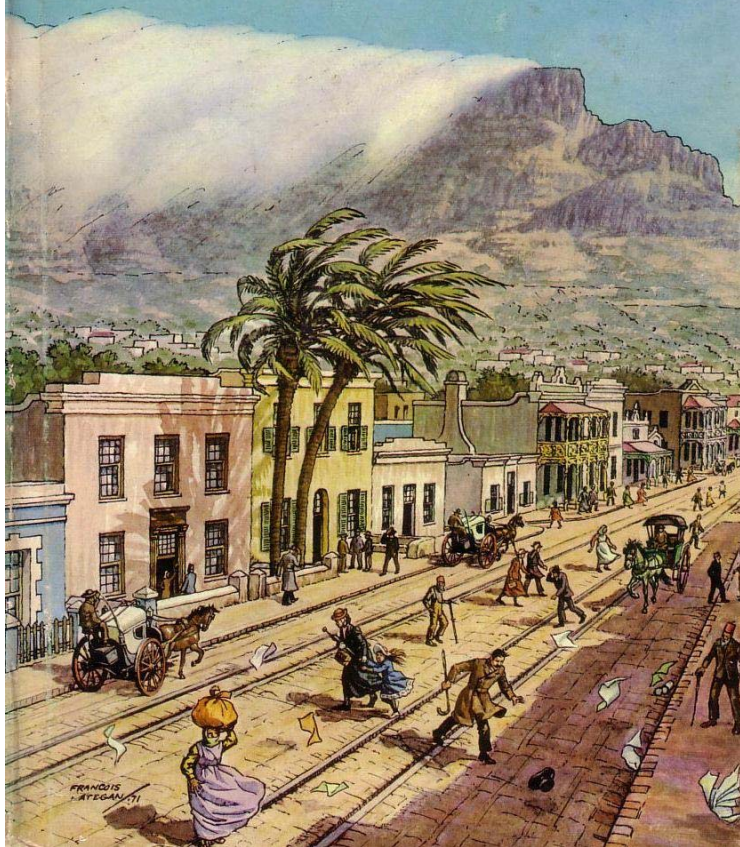


LAWRENCE G. GREEN

A TASTE OF SOUTH-EASTER



FRONTISPIECE

A Taste of South-Easter is Lawrence Green's fourth book dealing with the Cape Peninsula. The first, *Tavern of the Seas*, remained in demand for twenty years and more than 50,000 copies were sold; yet many readers may form the opinion that *A Taste of South-Easter* is the best of these books.

In this fine new work Lawrence Green brings you a number of unusual Cape Town characters he has never described before. You meet street entertainers, a ventriloquist who reveals his secrets, barmen and chefs, antique dealers, chemists and booksellers, a cigarette and postcard dealer and a tram-driver. A tattoo artists explains his trade and you hear a lecture on executions in a Cape

Town "chamber of horrors". There is a taxidermist in this cavalcade. The Malays are there with their singing and their magic. The old Rogge Bay comes to life again and the book ends in wine cellar.

Here indeed is a taste of south-easter in a memorable book that will appeal strongly to all South Africans – especially those who look upon Cape Town as their ancestral home.

Total sales of Lawrence Green's books (including school and overseas editions) exceed half a million copies.

LAWRENCE G. GREEN has also written;

- 1933 The Coast of Treasure
- 1935 Great African Mysteries
- 1936 Secret Africa
- 1937 The Coast of Diamonds
- 1938 Strange Africa
- 1940 Old Africa Untamed
- 1945 Where Men Still Dream
- 1946 So Few Are Free
- 1947 Tavern of the Seas
- 1948 To the River's End
- 1949 In the Land of Afternoon
- 1950 At Daybreak for the Isles
- 1951 Grow Lovely Growing Old
- 1953 Lords of the Last Frontier
- 1954 Under a Sky Like Flame
- 1955 Karoo
- 1956 There's a Secret Hid Away

- 1957 Beyond the City Lights
- 1958 South African Beachcomber
- 1959 These Wonders to Behold
- 1960 Eight Bells at Salamander
- 1961 Great North Road
- 1962 Something Rich and Strange
- 1963 A Decent Fellow Doesn't Work
- 1964 I Heard the Old Man Say
- 1965 Almost Forgotten, Never Told
- 1966 Thunder on the Blaauwberg
- 1967 On Wings of hire
- 1968 Full Many a Glorious Morning
- 1969 Harbours of Memory
- 1970 A Giant in Hiding

IN AFRIKAANS

- 1948 Min Mense is Vry
- 1964 Karoo

A TASTE OF SOUTH-EASTER

Memories of unusual Cape Town characters, queer shops and shows, old bars, hotels
and cafés and the panorama of the streets.

BY

LAWRENCE G. GREEN

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“These old streets and narrow alleys have watched the story of the town roll by with the centuries”

“Soon after leaving school I entered a mellow world with great educational possibilities”...

“Cannon litter the Peninsula, from ancient muzzleloaders to guns used in the Western Desert in World War II”

“I liked the Victorian flavour of the old chemists’ shops ... They pounded their ingredients with mortar and pestle, and rolled their own pills.

“Professor Labouchere assured me that one design often led to another until it was hard to find a bare patch on the body of a true enthusiast”.

“He came in wearing a white coat, like a laboratory assistant, mounted the steps and addressed us from the gallows platform”

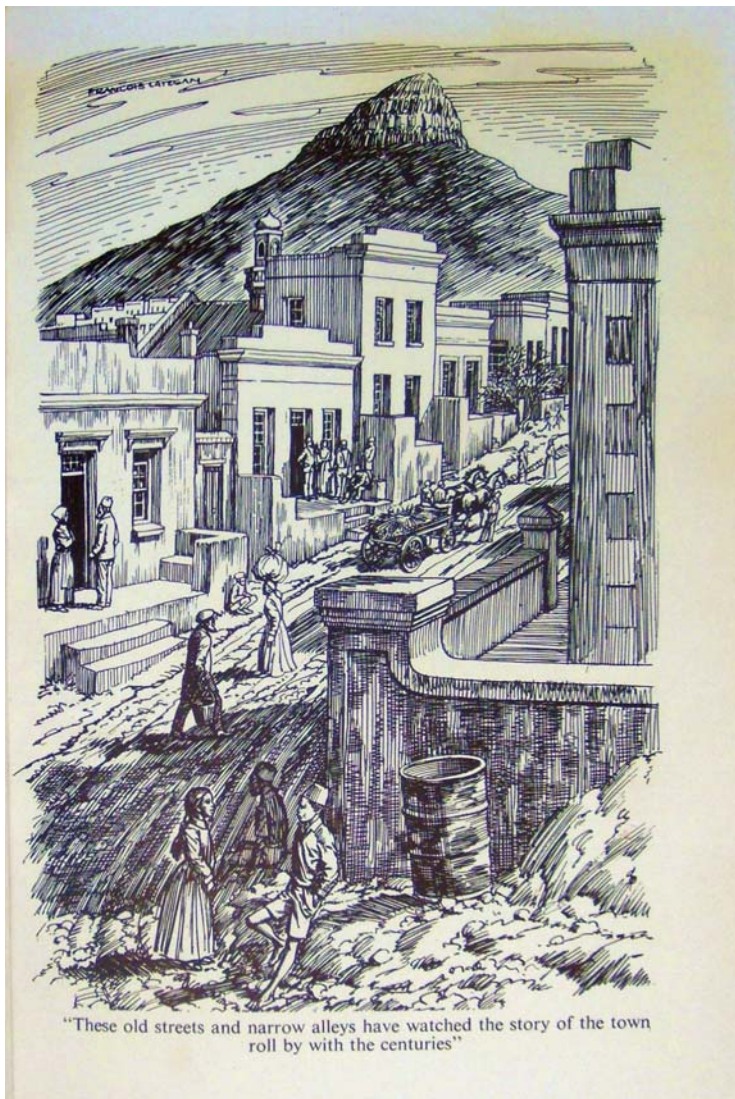
CHAPTER ONE
WANDERERS OF THE STREET

*Wanderers of the street, to whom is
dealt
The bread which without industry
they find.*

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

SUDDENLY I found myself staring down the corridors of Cape Town's past. Faces came into sharp focus as a long cavalcade of men and women returned to the streets they had known. Perhaps it was the south-easter that burst open the doors of memory; the violent wind that touches all the senses at once. In some mysterious way I often seem to taste a southeast gale. Was it a whiff of horseflesh on the wind that made so many of my ghosts walk? Yes, there comes a Malay wedding party,

four white horses with ostrich plumes, coachman with straw *toering* hat, bride with her golden crown and veil, the gorgeous light-skinned bridesmaids. Cape Town has a thousand spectacles and a thousand and one tales and the Malays helped long ago to give this rollicking old seaport its strong atmosphere. I could see and feel the character of Cape Town at that moment in a strange pilgrimage of the human mind. These old streets and narrow alleys have watched the story of the town roll by with the centuries. As the faces came back so there arose long-demolished buildings and forgotten goods in the windows of old-fashioned shops. I heard the drums and bugles of regiments on the march, the heavy boots of men who have passed on; and over



"These old streets and narrow alleys have watched the story of the town
roll by with the centuries"

the low house-tops sounded church-bells that ring no more.

Does memory hand me back a more romantic Cape Town than anyone knew in reality? I think not. Johannesburg has the money but only Cape Town possesses the treasure that is not to be found in mines. These streets and unpredictable alleys are rich with the spoils of time and the past lives again in walled and hidden gardens. Gale after south-east gale may rattle our shutters and sting our faces but the most furious wind cannot blow away the wealth of Cape Town's story. The characters I miss keenly are those I knew when the city was still in such a leisurely period of development that it was possible to carry on a conversation in the middle of the busiest thoroughfares without being menaced by the traffic.

Long Street has always been my favourite street. As a schoolboy I left my classmates eating dull sandwiches in the playground while I hurried down Long Street to the Café of my choice. (You will hear more of that Café for it made a first and lasting impression on me and left a fragrant memory.) Long Street provided a great deal of free entertainment in those days, from barrel organs to German bands. I did my shopping in Long Street and a shilling went a long way; comic papers that made my father wince, doughnuts and sweets. Of course I heard the call of the waterfront even in those days. I gazed upon eighteenth-century buildings in parts of the town; lovely fanlights, neat town houses with scrolls and urns, white facades that have been torn down in my time. Some of the

old squares looked very much like the market places used by farmers with ox-wagons early last century. Gracious dwellings, Dutch and Georgian and Regency stucco, were still there with their symmetrical sash-windows and simple iron railings. Often there was a black iron archway over the gate with a decorative bracket for an oil-lamp. Few people at that time had learnt to value such glorious relics. They preferred the fairly recent Victorian cast-iron balconies of Long Street. Foundries in Britain must have made huge fortunes out of these balustrades and railings, gates and ornamental gutters, grilles and arcades and the inescapable fluted lamp-posts. Sailing ships carried cast-iron cargoes as ballast at low rates. Much of this fantastic street furniture has gone but

Long Street flaunts a few pleasing examples and I hope the old pillar-boxes will still be there at the end of the century.

As a child I was more interested in light amusement than cast-iron. Even a hurdy-gurdy, carried by the owner, was not to be despised; that extinct instrument with strings set vibrating by a wheel. A barrel-organ was better. Musicians complained, that no shades of tone quality were possible but there was an art in grinding those street pianos so that the metallic rhythm was heard at its best. Children of all colours danced to the four or five tunes of the barrel-organ. If there was a monkey in a red coat and fez so much the better. Aristocrats among barrelorgan owners had drums, cymbals, triangle and castanets all playing together by the

same mechanism while the handle turned. The owner needed a strong and steady arm to churn out the music at the correct tempo. Now and again the owner's wife would take the handle for a spell and the owner would rattle a pair of spoons in time with the music; a refinement known in the trade as "doing the spoons".

German bands descended on the business streets from the so-called "German Town" at the top of Kloof Street. They came into a world that was still clattering with horse-transport and rumbling with noisy tram-cars; but these solemn and determined musicians always made themselves heard. They wore peaked caps and most of them had spectacles. Some bands were a dozen strong but even the smallest German band had a cornet, flute and the

"oom-pah-pah" of a bassoon. They all disappeared on the outbreak of World War I, never to return. I regarded the "one-man band" as better entertainment. This hard-working hero was festooned with instruments in likely and unlikely places. Pan-pipes were clamped just below his mouth. A big drum clung to his back and he had the drumsticks strapped to his elbows. He played the cymbals by means of strings attached to his heels. Bells hung from his arms and ankles. He could switch from pan-pipes to the cornet in his right hand or the clarinet in his left. Every week there came from the old Tivoli the music-hall songs that were whistled by newsboys all over the town and sung melodiously by peanut sellers outside the railway station. The

“one-man band” was always in fashion with his incredible performances; he must have gone to the Tivoli regularly.

Undisputed king of Cape Town’s gutter musicians during my childhood, however, was a fat and middle-aged Malay known as Fluiter Yussuf. He opened his show by whistling like a steam locomotive. This tremendous volume of sound became so well known that urchins ran to him from neighbouring streets and barrow-boys stopped selling tomatoes to listen. Even those lowly youngsters who followed the horse-drawn traffic in the hope of droppings would form an expectant group round Yussuf with their hand-shovels and brushes. Yussuf waited until a more prosperous audience had gathered and then puckered his lips

for the recital. Up and down the scale he trilled like a true musician tuning up for a great performance. His throat pulsed with power, high and silvery notes went forth into the heavens and Yussuf was away in a volksliedjie or Italian aria. His repertoire seemed endless. When he delivered *O sole mio* in a rapturous crescendo every balcony in the street would fill with admiring faces. Another liquid and compelling favourite was “Rosa”, an old Cape love song with baffling lines and words that are not heard in Afrikaans nowadays. The whole street joined in when Yussuf reached the chorus:

*Sy seg sy sal my nooit verlaat
Sy volg my waar ek gaan
Rosa Rosa diet een hart
En sy volg my waar ek gaan.*

Fluiter Yussuf, I must tell you, was more than a mere *siffleur*. As the show went on you realised that Yussuf was not only a locomotive and a canary but that he had a voice as well. In some uncanny way the resonating chamber behind his lips could produce a humming accompaniment as well as the whistled melody. Now and again the sudden emphasis of a *sforzando* would rock the audience, for it seemed incredible that one man should be capable of rendering a sweet flute-like whistle and the simultaneous hum of a bass.

After an inspired programme by Yussuf some of the other entertainers of the streets seemed pathetic. I never saw a pavement artist in Cape Town but there were buskers with banjos, harpists, escapologists and itinerant vocalists. At the bottom of the scale

was the dejected owner of a primitive gramophone in a pram. You paid a penny, the wax cylinder revolved and the music was all yours because it came through rubber tubes with earpieces like a stethoscope. The gramophone was still something of a novelty. I remember hearing a scratchy Tettrazzini for a penny. Another man tore newspapers into complicated patterns and for a tickey he would cut a piece of black paper into a profile of his patron. The same artist sold a kitchen gadget that would transform a radish or turnip into a rose. It looked easy when he handled the instrument but many a housewife returned home to find that she had not mastered the peculiar art.

Luigi Bozzolo was a familiar character with his pony drawn ice cream barrow decorated with flowers

and shaded by a striped canopy. “*Gelati - ecco urro poco*”, he cried. “Ice cream - behold a little.” Children turned the Italian words into “hokey pokey”. Vanilla was in great demand and there was a smaller canister with the strawberry flavour. All these people of the streets, traders and knife-grinders and contortionists, the man who split a potato open on his wife’s head with a sword; all these resourceful vagrants belonged to the era before machinery and the mass invasion of motor-cars. As a rule they played to gentle background noises; the pleasant jingle of harness and bells and snorting of horses; rumble of carts and carriages, thud of hooves and wheels on cobbles.¹ You could

hear the street cries clearly in those days. “Any shoes, hats or old clothes.” Only a few cries have survived, such as the “Oy-yai” and “Loy-ee, Loy-ee” of the newsboys. And in the Malay Quarter you can still hear the muezzin calling; twice in the daytime he goes out on the minaret of the mosque and three times during the night.

finally from the streets in November, 1969. Early in 1970 the municipality still owned nearly seventy horses, the youngest six, the oldest twenty-two. They were sent to the Strandfontein sewage treatment works to end their days grazing in the rich pastures there. Two hundred horses and one hundred and fifty mules owned by the South African Railways were stabled in Port Road, and the Malay drivers lived there, too, in a depressing row of corrugated iron hovels. This wagon transport headquarters was built in 1910 and disappeared finally in 1970.

¹ Cape Town once kept five hundred horses and mules for dirt-carts and other purposes. Horse-drawn cleansing carts disappeared

Swallows are fairly rare in Cape Town nowadays. Swarms of them skimmed up and down Adderley Street before World War I and they could be seen resting in hundreds on the cornices of the churches. You can see the starlings in Church Square easily enough and hear their chatter; but the twittering of the long-winged swallows is not so common as it was half a century ago. Swallows come all the way from Siberia, some of them from beyond the Arctic Circle, to nest on the Parliament buildings, rock faces and walls of houses. A century ago the naturalist Sclater said the European swallow was abundant in Cape Town; but this bird with the deeply-forked tail now seeks its food outside the city. Swallows live on flies. They found the right sort of flies in horse manure. Stables have

been replaced by garages; the powerful horses with shaggy-hooves no longer haul wagons and carts. The swallows go elsewhere for their flies and if they visit their old haunts it is, perhaps, only because of some ancestral memory of lavish meals provided in the streets.

Malays settled in Long Street when it was one of the town's boundary streets and they have never departed. I have a guide book published towards the end of last century that describes Long Street as "a long, ugly street of one-storey buildings inhabited by Malays"; an inaccurate description, for it became a street of contrasts early last century and it has never been ugly or monotonous. Cape Town's old artists seem to have been fond of Long Street. The celebrated Wilhelm Langschmidt

lived there and announced that he would be “happy to receive orders for oil paintings, miniature and large, as well as pastel paintings and chalk”. William Weideman, another of the street’s artists, illustrated the fine travel narrative by the merchant George Thompson, published in the eighteen-twenties.

Christiaan Schonegevel, possibly the first South African-born artist with any claim to fame, was another of this little band. He found it hard to make a living so he also taught music and worked as a compositor in the government printing office.

John Rowland Brown, a deaf and dumb artist, was brought up in the orphanage at the top of Long Street, the historic *weeshuis* that stood next to the German Lutheran Church for nearly one hundred and fifty years.

The kindly principal of the orphanage gave young Brown pencil and paper and a copy of the “Illustrated London News”. The boy revealed such talent that he was sent to England at the age of seventeen to study art. Very few of his paintings have been traced. The orphanage was started early last century by Mrs Margaretha Moller, a rich widow, as a home for “respectable forlorn women”. The orphanage came later with Thibault as the probable designer. This was the first orphanage in South Africa and it was built of brick set in clay. One huge room, shaped like a cross, ran the whole length and depth of the building. I remember the unusual semi-circular pediment and the facade which reminded architects of the Old Supreme Court, finished at

the same period. Over the front door was a clerestory light with a cartwheel pattern, in contrast with the usual fanlight. I believe the cartwheel and two windows were preserved when the building was demolished.

“Anything can be purchased in Long Street from a dried snoek to Browning’s poems,” wrote a visitor early this century. It had become a street of shops but it was known as “the lodging street” because so many people lived over the shops. Soon after World War II, I met a woman who had lived with her parents in Long Street during the sixties of last century. She was Mrs Maria Mitchell, daughter of a Scottish fisherman. Her father owned the schooner *Springbok*; he landed snoek at Rogge Bay and sold them for a

penny each, while a silver fish cost a ticky. Mrs Mitchell told me that she started work at the age of twelve, sweeping the floor of Saul Solomon’s printing works and picking up lead type. At the age of ninety she could still read the tiny six-point type without glasses. “Long Street was such a safe place when I was a child that we often slept with the front door open,” she told me. “Everything was so cheap, peaches cost a shilling a hundred, mutton was two pence a pound.”

When I first came to know Long Street, round about the time of Union, you looked towards the mountain and saw trees and old estates rather than tower blocks. Oranjezicht was still a farm. Over on the Devil’s Peak slopes was the rambling homestead called Mount

Prospect, with its vineyard and gardens. Vredehoek, the Mellish farm, was close by; and this was still a farm during World War I and for some years afterwards, a farm that was gradually surrounded by the city.

Long Street had tram lines running in the dead centre. I remember a watchmaker named Speight whose claim to fame rested on a golden model of the Albert Memorial which he had made; the Sultan of Jahore presented it to Queen Victoria as a jubilee gift. Jagger's boot factory, with five storeys, was about the tallest building in the street. Dix's Café (established in 1845) was there; for many years the only restaurant worthy of the name. Mr Katzen's windows often held my attention, for he dealt in ostrich feathers, boas,

karosses, leopard and other skins lined and mounted. Miscellanies offered by the pawnbrokers were also of interest, but I had not yet learnt to study the bottles displayed by the wine merchants. Mr Polliak described himself in those days as a phonograph dealer. No doubt there were voices in the shop that would command high prices today, lost voices on long-forgotten cylindrical records. Caruso must have been there. Possibly there was a recitation by Sarah Bernhardt, Paderewski at the piano, Dan Leno singing ... all those voices may have drifted out into Long Street from one of Mr Polliak's phonographs.

Long Street had an Italian Club at that time, a Chinese laundry, the London Tea Company, a fireworks depot, Van Veelo the tobacconist and Charles Villet the fishing-tackle dealer.

Grocers had their stables close to their shops, powerful stallions munching in their stalls after delivering the goods. Harness-makers flourished. The small workshops of candle makers and soap-boilers had not yet disappeared.

Fires provided real drama in those days. To my regret I came on the scene three decades after the old Malay brigade had been disbanded. Known as *pomp lompies*, they wore unsuitable conical straw hats, short jackets and wide trousers. Church bells were tolled when a fire was reported and the Malay firemen raced out of their homes or places of work and manned the hand-pumps. There were few absentees for each man received five shillings a fire, big money at that time, more than a day's ordinary pay. However, a serious fire

broke out in Longmarket Street one day in the eighteen-eighties, the four manual engines were late and the fire spread to Long Street. Troops were called out to keep the crowds in order. Fix bayonets! Citizens then felt that Cape Town needed a more efficient brigade. Ten years later the Burg Street fire station was opened, with steam fire engines; but horses remained in service for many years and were not replaced by machines until the internal combustion engine had become fairly reliable. The departure of the horse-drawn engines from Burg Street, the mad gallop through the streets with bells clanging, the headlong arrival at the blaze; these were scenes that gripped not only schoolboys but the whole population. Fire! Fire! The blue-clad firemen with polished helmets and

brass shoulder-straps (usually ex-sailors) were heroes indeed. The roaring, crackling and hissing noises of a great blaze formed an orchestra of destruction. This was better than watching a man swallowing glass or playing the Jew's harp. Here was fierce music and a glimpse of the inferno.

South-easters still roar down Long Street but some of the old sounds have gone. Once you heard the Sea Point trains passing across the end of the street, wheels clicking over the rails. At night there would be the flare from the locomotive firebox and the lights of the carriages. But the sound I recall over the years was one that could only have come up the street when Table Bay was closer than it is today. I was near the palms, a long way up Long Street, when I saw a

steamer moving out of the bay. She was going out in the evening, heading seawards at the end of a burning December day; she was leaving the heat and the hot people of the streets, going out into a cooler and more peaceful night than we would know. As she went her siren gave a long farewell. I shall hear the southeaster again but sirens have changed with the years and that plaintive siren note has gone with the ships of yesterday.

CHAPTER TWO

UNCLE MAC'S SECRET

IN the days when free entertainment meant a lot to me I met Mr C. S. H. MacKenzie, known to his audiences as Uncle Mac. He was a versatile performer and only when times were really bad did he join the hard-bitten pavement troupers. I saw him with his Punch and Judy show on the sands at Muizenberg but he preferred to appear at children's parties and in the big stores at Christmas time. Uncle Mac was a singer, impersonator, comedian and ventriloquist. I first saw him on the stage in an Adderley Street store with a dummy he called Cockney Joe. Many years afterwards he came into the newspaper office and told me his story. He was a tallish man with a fine head of blonde hair, a roguish smile, blue

twinkling eyes and lines of good humour all over his mobile face. He could alter his expression in a trice and I saw in him a man who had indeed played many parts.

"I came to Cape Town for my health at the end of last century, when I was twenty-one," Mac started. "Arthritis, that was my trouble. Now I'm cured. But I nearly killed myself giving a Punch and Judy show one day. You know that queer voice Punch has - they call it the 'Punch call' in the trade. Well, you have a sort of flat tin-whistle in your mouth to produce the traditional voice. I swallowed that whistle. It almost choked me. I got it back at last and carried on with the show but now I always have a long thread on the whistle. You never can tell. I knew a Punch and

Judy man who got the whistle in his lungs and that was the end of him.”

I asked Mac about ventriloquism. “Anyone can learn the game in an amateurish sort of way,” Mac replied. “But some people are better equipped for it than others and there are a few trade secrets.” Mac said he discovered his ability to “throw the voice” when he was a child. He was always doing imitations and he noticed that his listeners would often look over their shoulders as though his voice was coming from somewhere behind them. Then he realised that he could make people believe there was someone in a cupboard or a chimney. “It is simply a matter of breath control combined with acting,” Mac explained. “You have to contract your glottis, the opening at the top of the windpipe between

the vocal chords, so that the modulation of the voice is affected. Then you let the breath out slowly, using only the tip of the tongue for talking. The pressure on the vocal chords diffuses the sound, giving the impression of distance. Stand in front of a mirror, breathe in deeply, clench your teeth and smile. Then let the air out slowly as I said before and squeeze your voice into a few simple phrases such as: ‘How are you?’ To become an expert you must do regular exercises to get your jaws, throat, neck and tongue into condition. The beginner may feel the blood rushing into his head when he forces the sound from a tightly-closed throat. But I’ll show you - then you’ll be able to do it yourself.”

Mac turned his smiling India rubber face towards me for a moment and I

realised that this was an art that was not to be mastered in one lesson. He went over to a large cupboard in my office, rapped on the door, bent down and called: "Hello there -who's inside?" A muffled voice replied in Afrikaans. "I'm afraid I can't understand - please translate for me," said Mac apologetically. This was the trick that had fooled audiences all over South Africa for half a century. Mac may not have been thoroughly bilingual but he had the accent and a wide range of useful and humorous phrases. When an Afrikaans voice came out of a box or a barrel and Mac asked for an interpreter there were always volunteers.

He opened my office door, stood back and informed me that there was someone in the passage. "I want to

see Mister Green," said the voice. "I've got to see him. It's urgent. Let me in." I almost left my desk for Mac's acting had been perfect. "See the idea now?" inquired Mac. "Our ears are always deceiving us. We often simply do not know where certain sounds are coming from. Birds are natural ventriloquists - when they hide in a bush and sing you can't locate them. A ventriloquist cannot throw his voice but by directing the eyes of the audience to a certain point he can make his voice sound as though it is coming from a distance. When the vocal distortion produces a near voice we call it 'the grunt'. Punch and Judy men use 'the grunt'. A remote voice is known in the trade as 'the drone'. You push back your tongue and send nearly all the sound

out through your nose and the further you force back the drone the more distant it seems to be.”

Mac was an unrepentant practical joker. He loved to stop dead at a pillar-box, listen intently until a crowd gathered and then tap on the metal and utter the familiar question: “Hello there - who’s inside?” His faint but convincing Afrikaans voice seemed to have come out of loads of hay on farms, parrots’ cages, kennels and chimneys. Mac told me about the ventriloquist who followed a family procession into a church for a baptism. As the minister sprinkled the infant the tiny mouth opened and the ventriloquist saw that his moment had come. “Oh mom, the water is so cold,” the baby appeared to say. Mac disapproved of that sort of thing. “Going a bit too far,” he

remarked. “The godmother might have dropped the baby.”

Mac brought a dummy into my office one day, a Buffalo Bill character, long-haired and bearded, with an American accent. “Dummies are easier than distant voices,” he explained. “Making a dummy talk is more acting than true ventriloquism. You just keep your lips still and bring the dummy to life, not only by moving the mouth as you talk but also by manipulating the eyes, head and limbs. It calls for a lot of rehearsing in front of a mirror. You have to achieve close timing – then the listeners almost forget that the cheeky little fellow on the ventriloquist’s knee is a puppet.”

Of course the voice of the dummy has to be entirely different in pitch and accent from the natural voice of

the ventriloquist. Mac had many dialects in his repertory. His dummies had strong, rich voices. Mac was always the quiet man in the background, a subdued personality rather shocked by the impertinent and embarrassing remarks of the dummy.

“Just twenty-five pounds of metal and wood, rubber and rods and levers and glass eyes,” Mac reminded me. “But the audience soon invests that mechanism with a human character. It is the star of the show, such is the power of make-believe. The dummy must always remain the centre of attention.”

I asked Mac to repeat a famous sentence without moving his lips: “Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.” Mac admitted that it was impossible. “You have to avoid

using the letters ‘b’ and ‘p’”, he explained. “Use ‘t’ instead of ‘p’ and ‘d’ instead of ‘b’. The letter ‘m’ is difficult, too, so substitute ‘n’. Some ventriloquists twitch their mouths to overcome these problems. You hear one say ‘gred and gutter’ instead of ‘bread and butter’. But there are men at the top of the profession who can say almost anything without a twitch of the mouth. They do it with the tips of their tongue - I wish that I could.”

Mac told me that he had found good ventriloquists among the Zulus. Witchdoctors made use of ventriloquism in the same way as the old pagan oracles of Greece and the high priests of the Pharaohs. Mac knew a lot about his distinguished predecessors. He spoke of a French ventriloquist who entertained Napoleon and Josephine by mimicking all

the sounds of a distant foxhunt. Another old hand named Alexandre once stopped a ship by making the master believe that there was a man in the water shouting for help. Last century and even later the great ventriloquists put large groups of dummies on the stage, with a husband and wife quarrelling and the children taking part in the scene. Arthur Prince, the English ventriloquist, had the crew of a man-o'-war filling the stage; another performer produced a court scene in which he played the jester. Then came talking parrots and talking cats. The ancient art of ventriloquism almost died out when the talkies killed vaudeville but it was revived by the great Edgar Bergen and his dummy Charlie McCarthy. The impudent Charlie came out with jokes that were quoted

all over the world. Ventriloquists who had known hard times suddenly found their services in demand again. Senor Wences, the Spanish ventriloquist, arrived on the scene about the same time as Bergen but it was after World War II that Wences became famous. Wences is a supreme exponent of the "talking hand", a dummy made in a few seconds by using two discs held between the fingers as eyes, a little black wool as hair and a lipstick mouth.

Years ago I saw in Cape Town a ventriloquist known as Dr Walford Bodie raise a glass of water to his lips and empty it - or so it seemed - while his dummy was singing. I asked Mac how this was done. "There are two ways," he replied. "Most ventriloquists use the easy method, a trick glass in which the

water disappears into a hidden container. The other way is dangerous because the water may go down the wrong way and bring on a painful attack of coughing. Nevertheless it is possible to drink and sing at the same time. Harry Lester, the great American ventriloquist of the pre-World War I era, carried out this feat every night. Once a humorist in the orchestra filled the glass with wine. Lester was taken by surprise but he went on with the show, remaining perfectly calm while his dummy shook in a paroxysm of coughing. Yes, that joke appeared to choke the dummy. Lester was a great artist.”

Mac informed me that ventriloquism was not all pure entertainment. It was being used in the United States to help polio victims with weakened throat muscles. Exercises which

involve the diaphragm, carried out by people learning ventriloquism, had been found useful by polio specialists. Stammerers are helped in the same way. A traffic officer taught school children the principles of road safety by putting a dummy in charge of the lecture. Some years ago a Baptist minister found that he could drive home his religious messages more effectively with the aid of a dummy known as Joe the Baptist.

At the end of one long and fascinating session with Uncle Mac I urged him to tell me anything important, any secret he had left out of our conversation. “Well yes, I must confess that all the great ventriloquists possess a physical peculiarity,” Mac answered candidly. “It is a sort of natural resonance

formed in the space between the third and fourth ribs and the sternum. I am thankful to say that I have it. Those who are blessed in this way can work up a vibration of the voice which helps them tremendously in their work. Just listen to this.”

Mac stood there vibrating visibly. To my astonishment I heard in turn a police siren, a circular saw, a deep-toned church organ, the lowing of a cow, a noise like the swarming of bees, the neighing of a horse and the comb and paper sound of an aircraft taking off. It came to me suddenly that this was not an art to be learnt through the post or in a library. This was a sort of genius and I wondered whether Mac had gained a fair reward for his thousand and one performances. “Yes, I’ve done pretty

well,” Mac declared finally. “I’ve made a lot of people laugh.”

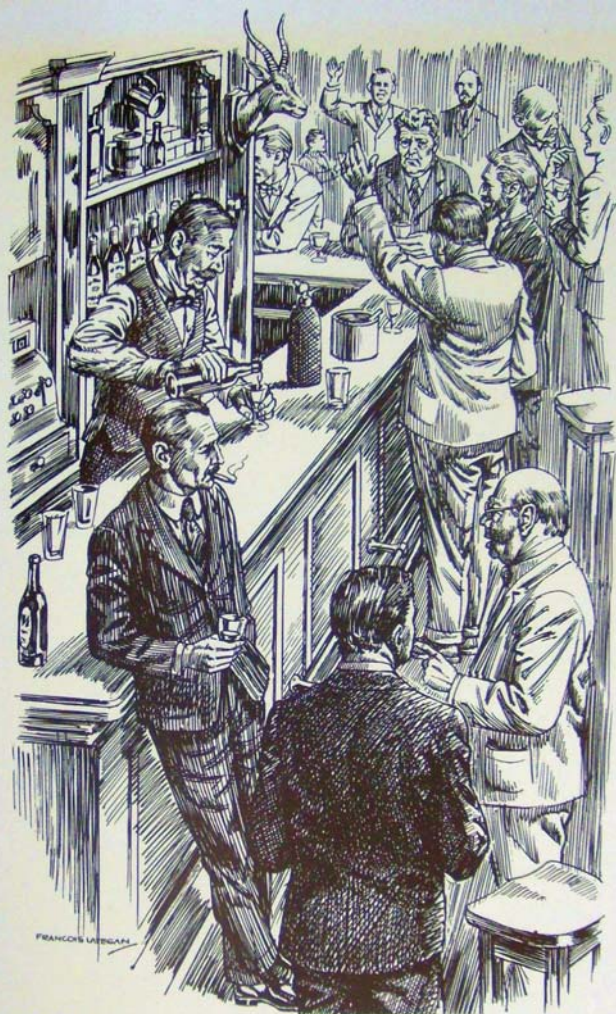
CHAPTER THREE
WITH LAUGHTER AND WITH GLEE

*There is a tavern in the town,
And there my true love sits him
down,
And drinks his wine with laughter
and with glee,
And never, never thinks of me.*

ANON.

SOON after leaving school I entered a mellow world with great educational possibilities, a world that I had only glimpsed previously. It was there in a pub off Plein Street that I met Harry for the first time. "Be of good cheer, place a foot on the rail and an elbow on the counter," Harry invited. "Beer is best and beggar the Band of Hope."

Harry was one of those splendid men who live without thought of tomorrow. He was a little chap with Victorian side choppers, reddish when I first met him and grey years afterwards. His mild, humorous eyes were experienced. At times he had the manners of a diplomat and I took him for one of those English family retainers who had by chance become a barman. No, said Harry, he had always been a barman. He asked me not to mention his surname as some of his relatives did not approve of the bar trade. Harry reached Cape Town from England towards the end of last century and he had polished glasses and counters everywhere from Salisbury to Durban, from Kimberley to Simonstown. He was enormously interested in bars, hotels and restau-



"Soon after leaving school I entered a mellow world with great educational possibilities"

rants and when he spoke of bygone inns and taverns you might have formed the opinion that he went back a century or more. Harry was a living repository of the lore and legend of his chosen profession and he loved talking about the bars he had known. He was my favourite barman.

As you know, barmen are often called upon to settle arguments. "Customer asked me which was Cape Town's oldest pub - and blowed if I could tell him," remarked Harry one day. "Not for certain, that is. But I did my best." Harry then gave me the benefit of his research work in this refreshing field.

Cape Town, said Harry, was one of the thirstiest seaports in the world and there had been so many pubs that a man could easily lose track of them. "Before my time, in the middle

of last century, there was one canteen to every couple of hundred people," Harry declared. "Even when I got here there were practically no liquor restrictions. Sunday closing had come into force but otherwise almost anyone could get a licence and sell liquor at almost any hour. Hard work it was, too, with regular customers dropping in for their breakfasts of whisky and milk and others playing cards until the early hours of the morning."

I reminded Harry about his historical research. "Ah, yes, the oldest pub," he went on. "Some say the Thatched Tavern held the record because it was in the same place for so long. Old prints show a single-storied thatched building which may have been there in the eighteenth century as a private house. But no one knows

when it became an inn.” Harry said the Thatched Tavern was once given as a wedding present to a reporter who attended meetings at the Town House next door; a wonderful present that enabled the bridegroom to retire from journalism. At that period town councillors met in the Thatched Tavern and settled their business before going on to the official meetings.

Harry thought the Fountain Hotel in Hour Street might be Cape Town’s oldest pub. Lord Hawke’s cricket team stayed there at the end of last century; the hotel was then nearly a hundred years old. Harry Magor was the proprietor and there was a fountain in the lounge. Magor had a framed advertisement dated 1860 in which the Fountain was offering “brandy smashes, brandy punches

and sherry cobbles”. But a claim might also be made out for the Sun in Zieke Street, now Corporation Street. Bob Vokes, a Currie Line steward who became owner of the Sun, traced the licence back to the early years of last century. Harry also mentioned the Gloucester Bar in Commercial Street (formerly Boom Street) which had the coat-of-arms of a distinguished Huguenot family over the front-door. The main reception rooms became the bars. Then there was the Oriental Hotel in Leeuwen Street, built like a farm homestead with a high stoep in Dutch East India days.

Charlie Frisch, a diamond and gold pioneer, had the place during World War I; and his father, a Crimean War veteran, was one of the bar characters. Harry had the Waterford Arms

in Loop Street on his list, for the bar had been there since the eighteenth-twenties. Fishermen were good customers for many years.² There was the Bodega Bar, which closed down voluntarily during World War I, a most unusual event; the Good Hope in Loop Street and the Crescent; all old pubs. Harry could not place the Black Horse (on the present Red Lion site) but he recalled a Welshman named Charles Beer taking it over in 1900 and trebling the business. Beer had been a fishmonger. He offered his customers brown stout and oysters, and every

² The Waterford Arms was demolished in December 1969 to make way for a tower block. The walls were three feet thick and some windows were heavily barred, for the building was a police station before it became a bar.

mail boat brought him salmon and turbot and Yarmouth bloaters.

Out in the suburbs there was that old Claremont landmark the Crown, standing in its acres of fruit trees. The Crown was famous for wedding breakfasts. People drove there in Cape carts and carriages at weekends and on holidays. During the eighteen-eighties the proprietor advertised skittles, bicycle racing, picnics under the trees. Coloured lanterns decorated the Crown's private forest at night and Christy's string quartet played for the dancers. Scenes at the Crown before the enforcement of Sunday closing resembled an English country fair. A modern and more sedate Crown was sold in 1969 for nearly a quarter of a million Rands. Harry also mentioned the Old Standard at Wynberg,

opened early last century as Ye Olde Standard. It is possible that Arthur Wellesley, later Duke of Wellington, visited the Standard for he lived at Waterloo Green close by. Mr Louis Briel, a recent proprietor of the Standard, retired to become a landscape painter.

Furniture and decorations in some of Cape Town's old bars would be worth fortunes today. Harry described the Queen of the South, a romantic name indeed, in Buitenkant Street. He said that George Cummings, the owner, filled every room with valuable antiques. Cummings was there for thirty-five years, but he lost his licence during World War I. After closing time on the last day poor old George Cummings was found dead behind the counter. It was thought at first that he had

committed suicide but the inquest verdict was "natural causes". He could not bear the idea of parting with the Queen of the South and he must have died of a broken heart.

Harry remembered the time when the Grand Hotel bar in Strand Street resembled a museum. Mr Hartley Tillotson, the lessee, had one of the finest collections of animal heads and horns in Southern Africa; two hundred pairs of horns, some noteworthy for perfect symmetry, others for strange deformities. Tillotson was known in the trade as "the Genial". He spent forty years collecting his specimens and told strange tales in his bar of visits to remote kraals and lonely places in search of rarities.

Customers at the Clyde in Dorp Street early this century found

themselves in a sort of art gallery. A painter named Sutherland had decorated the ceiling with a sky of fleecy clouds. On the walls were canal scenes in Holland, landscapes from Ireland and Wales, a view of Prince's Street, Edinburgh, Conway Castle and Stratford-on-Avon. "That sort of thing gives a pub atmosphere," Harry confided one day. "I've seen everything in my time. Shipwreck relics, skulls of fish and python skins, daggers and bandoliers, matchboxes from every land on earth, blunderbusses and antique pistols. I like to see pewter ale pots and old copper spirit-measures - they suit a pub better than a wall-eyed buck bitten to death by moths."

Many of the old bars of Cape Town have been transformed within living memory, especially those in the

harbour area. Mechau Street (off Dock Road) was a waterfront street when the first inn was built there more than two centuries ago. Title deeds show that a little building with a dining-room, kitchen and two bedrooms was known a century ago as the Somerset Hotel. Steamers were competing with sailing-ships in those days and the hotel proprietor changed the name to the Fireman's Arms to attract thirsty stokers. The ancient pub was pulled down about sixty years ago and a new Fireman's Arms arose on the historic site. Firemen dwindled when ships began using oil fuel and the Fireman's Arms was adopted by the growing army of motor-mechanics. It is one of those homely bars with a club atmosphere. Four hundred members have their own glass beer tankards

inscribed with their names. Mr Emmanuel Zammit, a Maltese seaman, fulfilled a well-known seafaring ambition by becoming manager of the pub in 1907 and he was still there, working behind the counter, in 1969 on his ninetieth birthday. In his youth Zammit served in the Royal Navy. He was a survivor of the historic collision between the battleships *Victoria* and *Camperdown* in the Mediterranean in 1893 when hundreds of lives were lost. Emmanuel's son Ernest is one of those saloon artists who decorate their own walls with oil paintings. Here, too, a long glass known as a "yard of ale" is displayed; it is shaped rather like an old-fashioned coaching horn and holds a quart or more. This is not the easiest way of swallowing beer and the man who

emptied the glass in less than half a minute must have been an expert.

Micky Quinn, an American seaman, was manager of a venerable pub called the Silver Tree in Waterkant Street during the 'eighties of last century. Troopships bound for India, the *Orontes* and *Tagus*, sometimes called at Table Bay in those days. The soldiers were lively but Quinn told Harry that the busiest time he ever had was when hundreds of seamen from HMS *Raleigh* flooded into the bars. "Those old sailor men were jolly souls anxious for beer and good company," Quinn declared. "The toughest customers of all were Russian Finns who had made long voyages under sail and had money to burn." Harry said the firemen who came later in American ships were even more rowdy. They ran amuck

after a long dry spell at sea. Once they took possession of the Carlton bar in Dock Road and broke glasses, bottles and mirrors worth one hundred and fifty pounds.

Monarch of Dock Road publicans for many years was Maurice Goodall of the Queen's Hotel. I remember this great sportsman with the lean face and light moustache, for when I joined the old Table Bay Yacht Club in 1916 he was a member and had been the first commodore. Maurice Goodall arrived in Cape Town from Canada as a child in the eighteen-seventies. His father bought the newly-built Queen's Hotel a few years later. Father and sons Maurice and Sid were all redoubtable boxers and they turned a room at the Queen's into a gymnasium. The Queen's, standing at the dock gates,

was known as "the first and last bar". Seamen ordered the celebrated draught beer on arrival and also before re-embarking if they had any money left. Maurice Goodall owned the yacht Canada and gained a reputation for sailing in all weathers without reefing. After selling Canada he bought the fourteen-ton ketch Brighton Girl, which had sailed out to Table Bay from England. Maurice boxed with Kid McCoy in South Africa and was a popular boxing referee.

One hot morning at ten I found myself in Harry's bar drinking a ginger-ale while other clients ordered their eye-openers. To watch Harry going into action was an inspiring sight. Some barmen are mere pourers and glass-washers but Harry was a craftsman. His tools were corkscrews

and ice tongs, picks and scoops, strainers and funnels. A pantry boy brought in lemons and oranges, fruit, fresh milk and eggs, sprigs of mint, castor sugar. Harry set out his cutting-board with fruit knife and lemon-peeler; then he was ready for any order from cocktails to egg nog.

Those were the days when snacks were free. Harry sent for fresh-roasted almonds, potato crisps, cheese straws and cashew nuts. "They'll want something more solid later in the morning and I'll give it to them," Harry declared. "Hot potatoes go down well with a glass of beer. Some customers come in here, buy one drink and nibble a whole meal - but the boss doesn't care and neither do I. Meat balls and cocktail sausages vanish at lunch-time like snow under the sun. I once worked for a

German who put out pig's-knuckles and sauerkraut, soups and stews, corned beef, huge slabs of hot roast beef - why, the aroma was worth the price of a drink. But there was one thing I noticed. He never gave away anything that would quench a customer's thirst."

Harry refilled a shaker bottle with orange bitters, greeted an old customer and found the right drink before he asked for it, emptied an ashtray and filled a jug with fresh ice-water. "What do you give 'em for a hangover, Harry?" I asked.

"Suisse," he replied. "It's not much good, mind you. Better take a glass of milk before you start and avoid drinking too much. But a Suisse helps some of 'em - white of egg, jigger of pernod, dash of anisette and soda. That reminds me,

a barman in Cape Town once won a prize of one hundred pounds for inventing a cocktail with white of egg in it. He called it a 'South Easter' and shook up a tot of vodka, a tot of orange juice, tot of passion fruit, juice of half a lemon, dash of Angostura and, of course, the egg. It made a nice sight decorated with fruit, cherry and a sprig of mint and topped up with lemonade. Another barman won a smaller prize with a mixture of Van der Hum and brandy, Tia Maria and cream. However, I would rather have a whisky any day."

"Scotch?" I inquired.

"Scotch of course," replied Harry firmly. "Irish whiskey is strictly for the Irish, like shamrocks and shillelaghs. The flavour of pot still Irish whiskey is entirely different

from Scotch. What you get in the finest Scotch whisky is a blend of malt and grain whiskies in equal parts. A pure drink with the aroma of peat and alcohol and heather. Why, I knew a commercial traveller who was on the road in South Africa for nearly half a century. He drank a bottle of Scotch a day, sometimes two bottles, and when I last saw him he was getting on for eighty. Of course he always took his Scotch with water - fourteen thousand bottles of Scotch."

"How about Bourbon?" I asked.

"Only fit for Southern colonels with goatee beards," declared Harry. "Give me a Plymouth gin at lunch-time and Scotch whisky in the evening. And remember, when you have gin and bitters you must never drown the gin by using too much

bitters. Three drops of Angostura and you get the bite, the tang, the true flavour.”

Harry said that most barmen liked an occasional drink but some found it easier to be teetotallers. Such a one was Macdougall Sutherland, probably the oldest barman in Southern Africa just after World War II, for he was still at work at the age of eighty. Macdougall's last job was out at Bellville. He was known as “Have a cigar Mac” because there was usually a cigar between his lips. Macdougall gave up alcohol back in 1895. He was an alert, clean-shaven Scot with memories of early days on the Rand and he had known some of the millionaires. J. B. Robinson annoyed him owing to his habit of leaving his white sun helmet on the bar counter; so one day Macdougall

retaliated by painting the helmet black. Macdougall was dismissed but soon found another job at De Aar. The railway workers there persuaded their barman to stand for Parliament. He did so - and lost his deposit.

Harry informed me that he had never been ambitious. Three good meals a day and a quiet life were enough. He had never found the work monotonous though he had heard the same toasts, the same discussions year after year. “Here's how!” “Hope you choke!” “Over the river!” “Looking at you!” “Gesondheid!” For half a century he had listened to racing talk, tales of unspeakable employers, the weather, the same smoking-room stories. Drunks? Harry knew how to deal with drunks. He busied himself at the far end of the bar and simply could not find

time to serve them. Now and again he managed to persuade a difficult customer to drink something harmless. "Very awkward when a man passes out in the bar," Harry explained. "You must have a sort of instinct when you handle drunks." However, it was all in the day's work, like organising raffles and running a Christmas turkey club. Harry knew how to remain silent unless he was included in the conversation; he also knew how to steer a discussion away from controversial subjects. Harry was tolerant. He had the desire to please. He was the custodian of the poor man's "home from home", a dedicated guardian of tradition. I doubt very much whether he had ever heard of Samuel Johnson but he would have agreed heartily with his

famous words: "There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man by which so much happiness is produced, as by a good tavern or inn."

Cape Town had bars and boarding houses long before the first real hotel opened its doors. The demand for food and drink at the old "Tavern of the Seas" was put rather bluntly by Governor van Assenburgh early in the eighteenth century. "It is as if the Cape is held together by gorging and boozing," he complained. Decades later the Swedish traveller Jacob Wallenberg declared: "Promenading the Company's garden is the only amusement. The Cape has no public pleasures. Assembly rooms, opera, masquerade are here not known even by name. There is no tavern, no coffee house, no billiard saloon, no

news club. I disregard some few alehouses for sailors.” Nevertheless other writers referred to the music and dancing at the alehouses and the free pipes and free tobacco. Wallenberg was too particular.

Apparently the modern hotel era did not start in Cape Town until after the British arrived. The first inn-keepers were appointed by Van Riebeeck for reasons set out in his diary. Van Riebeeck wrote: “We have daily a large number of people who come and fill at the Castle and these people, including officers of ships, ministers of the Church, sailors, soldiers, families and even barbers take with them knives, forks and dishes thinking it belonged to the honourable company and that they could, therefore, help themselves.” So Annetje Boom, wife of the chief

gardener, was allowed to open a tavern to provide men from passing ships with lodging and refreshment. Within two decades there were so many taverns in the settlement that the directors in Holland ordered all but nine to be closed. Guests were not allowed to carry knives but they drank Peter Visagie’s local beer (regarded as a cure for scurvy) and they could watch cock-fights. Cape wines came on the market and “delicious Cape brandy” followed. Menus at the early taverns, however, were not luxurious. Fish was often plentiful and there were penguin eggs from the islands. Seals and dassies provided some of the meat; other meat was usually salted. Smoked porcupine was a delicacy. Bacon, rice, flour and beans were not to be enjoyed every day. The meat shortage

was so acute that even a lion was salted down. Cakes and biscuits were baked by two freemen “for those who wish to live more daintily”. Tea and coffee were unobtainable - hence the strong demand for alcohol.

Full board cost three shillings a day early in the eighteenth century. Captain James Cook paid only half-a-crown in the seventeen-seventies for “victuals, drink and lodging”. But the lodgings were private houses, varying greatly in amenities. One of the best at the end of the eighteenth century was the widow Van den Bergh’s inn at the lower end of Longmarket Street near the Castle and the company’s stables. It was described as “one of the most handsome and largest inns in the town”. Distinguished visitors stayed there and spoke of the courtyard with vines on a trellis. The

building, no longer handsome, was still there a few years ago.

Innkeepers sent out runners in rowing-boats to meet ships entering Table Bay and to persuade the passengers to accompany them on shore. The boats were rowed by black slaves. When they came alongside a vessel the runners stood up and shouted the merits of their establishments; some had dancehalls with slave musicians; harp and violin, flute and drum.

Mirza Khan, a Persian prince, called at the Cape just before the end of the eighteenth century and his diary includes unhappy experiences in various lodgings. His first landlord, Barnet of Simonstown, he describes as “a very smooth speaker and polite”. Board and lodging cost five rupees a day, then the equivalent of

twelve shillings and sixpence. At first the prince's wishes were attended to "without any noise, bustle or confusion". Later on Barnet became rude and doubled the rates. The prince then moved on to Cape Town and was given a room in Mr. Clarke's house. He was unable to have a bath, hot or cold. Clarke turned out to be "as great a black-guard as Barnet". The prince was interested in food and visited the markets. "The sheep here are of the large-tailed species and afford a great quantity of grease and tallow," he wrote. "Vegetables are very good and in great variety but their wheat and rice are indifferent. Fresh butter is with difficulty procured but there appears to be a great abundance of everything else. Meat is 71d a pound, bread 3d a pound and eggs 3d each.

Washing is also very dear." Prince Mirza Khan hired a room in the house of "a worthy Musselman" who behaved with the greatest attention and kindness.

Samuel Hudson and his brother Thomas appear to have been the English hotel pioneers in Cape Town. They had a "family hotel" facing the Parade in 1802; and the following year they applied to the government for another private hotel permit, making it clear that they did not intend to run a tavern or gaming house. This was granted and Hudson's Hotel in the Heerengracht soon gained a good reputation. They advertised their meals, offering dressed ham, brawn, collared beef, potted venison and tongues and Colyn's red and white Constantia wines.

I think the honour of opening the first licensed hotel must go to Edward George, a Londoner, whose George Hotel in Hout Street was regarded in 1817 as the best hotel in the town. George moved to the Heerengracht twelve years later and all agreed that his new establishment was “smart and expensive”. Meanwhile a formidable rival had appeared, the St. George’s Hotel at the corner of St. George’s and Church Street. The first St. George’s Hotel was a typical handsome old Cape Town mansion with one storey and a wide verandah. The second St. George’s was built in 1872 and early this century it was famous for its cocktail bar, presided over by Hildebrand; the longest bar in Cape Town. Mr T. Mulvihall, a great racing man in his day, lost a fortune as

owner of the hotel. A famous manager was Mr L. Leuw, who went from the St. George’s to Gatti’s, the Bohemian restaurant in the Strand, London. (Leuw tried to turn Gatti’s into a South African outpost, offering Cape wines, fruit, biltong and penguin eggs; but he failed to secure the necessary support.) The St. George’s Hotel was pulled down a few years before World War II to make way for an extension to an insurance building.

Back to the Heerengracht of the eighteen-forties. William Parke, a confectioner who also ran ‘buses to Wynberg, decided to enter the hotel trade. He had been running Papenboom, the old brewery in Newlands Avenue, as a boarding-house; now he opened Parke’s Hotel at the corner of Heerengracht and Strand Street, the

present Grand Hotel site. Parkes, with the aid of his wife and pretty daughters made a great success of it. "Warm and cold baths are available at any hour of the day," Parkes announced, a novelty at that period.

Another comfortable hotel was the Imperial in the Keizersgracht, facing the Parade. Boarders paid seven pounds a month and the daily rate was seven shillings and sixpence. The hotel moved to Shortmarket Street and is now the Green Hansom. For many years there was a Masonic Hotel near the Parade, a hostelry noted for gargantuan meals. I have before me a Masonic banquet menu. Guests were offered two soups, stewed fish, poached eggs, beef olives, Indian curry and rice, roast partridge, eight other poultry dishes, four roasts and eleven sweets.

Members of the old Cape House often lunched at the Commercial Hotel in Grave Street, now Parliament Street. Tapioca and tomato soup cost sixpence, boiled fish with anchovy sauce was sixpence. Stuffed sheep's heart, stewed trotters and tomatoes, haricot chops, Indian curry, roast duck and roast mutton were all priced at one shilling. Roast goose was the most expensive dish, one shilling and three pence, and you wound up with apple dumplings, sixpence. Parliamentarians also patronised Poole's Hotel in Queen Victoria Street, an old double-storied, flat-roofed building. It was nearly a century old when it was demolished in the nineteen-thirties. Rhodes and Jameson often lunched at Poole's during the session. Vere Stent, journalist and war correspon-

dent, was there one day when a Cockney waiter pointed to Rhodes and his friends and whispered: "There they sits a-plotting', and a-plotting' and a-plotting'." This occurred during a dramatic period and the waiter was probably right.

Plein Street had a Hotel d'Europe in the eighteen-sixties, a grand old mansion with a high, broad stoep along the full length of the building. Fanlights and sash windows, heavy mouldings, urns and wreaths of plaster flowers, teak woodwork and steps of yellow klompje bricks made a splendid facade. This hotel became the Royal, the famous Royal. The mansion gave way to a new building specially designed as an hotel with one hundred and twenty bedrooms. Barney Barnato often stayed there. Isidore Hirsch managed the Royal

early this century. He and his wife Rosa came from Germany and started by selling tea and coffee on the Muizenberg station platform. They ran Farmer Peck's, Hirsch's Hotel and the Marine before moving into the city. That great hotelier George Koenig took charge of the Royal shortly before World War I and gave value such as Cape Town had not known before. Koenig had worked in Monte Carlo and Cairo, Constantinople and London. He had been chef, head waiter, manager of the Rand Club, and he spoke several languages. His sons had to start in the kitchen to learn the art of hotel-keeping as their father had done. George Koenig loved to act as host to other leading South African hoteliers. You might find him sharing a bottle of champagne with

Pierre Etellin of the Carlton, Johannesburg; the man who worked under Escoffier and catered for King Edward VII. Michael Zoccola always called on Koenig. Zoccola was successful at the Grand National but the huge vineyard he planned on the Lombardy Estate was a colossal failure. No one wanted Transvaal wine.

When the International Hotel, Mill Street, opened in the eighteen-eighties, T. W. O'Callaghan the proprietor advertised the first hotel tennis court in South Africa. One of Heinrich Egersdörfer's paintings shows bearded men in hats and jackets and women in corsets taking part in mixed doubles there. The band of the Fifty-eighth Regiment played in the garden and the huge verandah was crowded at every

performance. O'Callaghan was noted for his hospitality to visiting priests and nuns; they were never presented with a bill.

You may have noticed the number of Cape Town bars and hotels that came into the possession of seafarers. Nicholas Adelaine, for example, was a Greek who exchanged the deck of a sailing-ship in 1890 for the hotel trade. He became proprietor of the Good Hope Hotel in Loop Street and leader of the Greek community in Cape Town. Adeline helped to build the Greek Church of St. George at Woodstock. He was Greek consul for years and during World War I the King of Greece awarded him a knighthood for his services. Adelaine often served interesting Greek dishes at the Good Hope; taramosalata and roast lamb on skewers. A later

proprietor catered for a Royal Air Force reunion dinner and was asked to put on roast peacock with chestnuts. Peacock is a gorgeous cousin of the turkey but the flesh was popular only at the time when turkeys were unknown. The tough and tasteless peacock requires skilful cooking if it is to become palatable. A Durbanville farmer supplied the peacocks and they were served in the traditional style at the Good Hope with the tail feathers as decoration. This menu reminds me of a feast devised by the celebrated Cape hotelier A. O. Hoppe when a governor was attending a banquet under his roof. The menu was printed on green silk. The dinner included caviar, oyster soup, English salmon, wild duck, quail on toast, roast beef, roast lamb and roast turkey, duckling, English

pheasant and the finest wine the world has ever known, Chateau Lafite.

The original Grand Hotel in Strand Street was bought by the Union S.S. Company and rebuilt in the eightennineties in a style "equal to London and Paris". There were electric lights on the tables, Axminster carpets, a grand piano and a balcony promenade three hundred and fifty feet long and twelve feet wide. The site had cost the company £26,000 and the building about the same amount. Shop tenants were informed that "the front of the hotel is a popular Cape Town promenade where youth and beauty meet". Lunch at the official opening, prepared by the French chef, started with turtle soup and sherry and went on luxuriously to Scotch salmon,

boiled turbot, lobster patties, cutlets, quenelles, pigeon, a claret sorbet, punch, capons braised in champagne, roast saddle of mutton, larded fillet of beef, grand special champagne, grouse, diplomat pudding and five other sweets. French apple tarts were offered, followed by caviar as a savoury and an iced pudding. It was a point of honour in those days, I gather, to serve only imported delicacies. What time, I wonder, did the lunch end?

Hotel grading has killed many picturesque hotels in the Cape districts, those romantic old coaching inns of the transport roads. Among the survivors is the Houw Hoek Hotel, said to be the oldest of them all. It stands in a wooded hollow close to the giant Bluegum tree. This was once a famous halt for travellers

bound from Cape Town to Caledon. Lady Anne Barnard enjoyed boiled chicken “fit for an emperor” at this inn. Lady Duff Gordon commented favourably on the absence of fleas. She paid nine shillings for dinner, bed and breakfast. When the railway came to Houw Hoek the innkeeper served meals to passengers on the platform. Inevitably the absurd story was told of the soup being so hot that the customers had no time to eat the rest of the meal. They were not such fools! Many country hotels of the transport days started as thatched, wattle and daub winkles; corrugated iron and matchboard lining came later. Only the more prosperous owners had a piano or billiard table. Light was supplied by enormous paraffin lamps. Floors were of *mis* or stamped earth. You might find such a

place almost hidden in the mountains beside a willow lined stream. The barman would sell you anything from a mouse-trap to a pair of sheep-shears. If you looked into the stables you realised that for years the guests had arrived in Cape carts or on horseback. The combined hotel, shop and post office has not disappeared, though the furnishings are probably more luxurious than they were in the days of my youth. How well I remember the gin bottles serving as water carafes, the little thread-bare towels, the enormous carved side-board in the dining-room. Now and again, close to a modern hotel, you can see the old place still serving as an annex.

Almost within living memory the hotels at Woodstock were out in open country. A homestead on the

Van der Byl farm at Woodstock became the Lord Milner Hotel. It stood in a vineyard and between the hotel and the sea were only the bushes and the dunes. Lord Milner and "Onze Jan" Hofmeyr stayed at this hotel. The farm dairy is now used as a wine cellar and the bar was the room where the Van der Byl children had their lessons. Woodstock has another celebrated hotel, the Altona, named after an old farm in the area. Jimmy Weight, a seaman from the cable steamer Great Northern, held the lease in the early years of this century. His son Bob gave up the lease fifty years later. On the last night Bob Weight received a gold watch from his regular customers. Drinks were on the house and more than three hundred "free loaders" attended the ceremony.

Bottles of beer, whisky, gin and brandy were handed over the counter. Bob Weight and two friends who were with him at Delville Wood were escorted from the bar by Caledonian Society pipers. The hotel was then taken over by a brewery. It was the end of a long day's march for Bob Weight.

Cogill's at Wynberg was opened by William Cogill in the middle of last century. Cogill was a dentist and he left a museum-piece at the hotel, a dentist's chair with treadle for drilling and other fearsome equipment. Evidently he found hotel-keeping profitable for he also owned the Halfway House at Diep River and the Anchor at Simonstown. Cogill's was rebuilt completely at different periods; the final Tudor style with gabled bottle-store was as recent as

World War II. Cogill's was kept busy during all the wars by soldiers from Wynberg Camp. Thousands of burgers arrived in Wynberg during World War I on their way to German South West Africa. One pay-day found them on the Main Road, running horse-races which were started by rifle-shots. Cogill's was the finishing-post and the scenes in the bar that day were memorable. Towards the end of 1969 the hotel became a patch of bare red soil.

Down the road from Cogill's there was once an eighteenth century farmhouse that was turned into an inn. The farmer enriched himself by refreshing horsemen on the road between Cape Town and Simonstown. In the eighteen-twenties the inn was known as Merckell's "Traveller's Joy". Then a merry

giant from Germany named Johan George Rathfelder became landlord and made the place famous. Rathfelder appears in many travel books and reminiscences and most of the authors spoke favourably of the inn. Anglo-Indians, army officers, colonial officials and members of the Cape Hunt Club loved the isolated building, two miles from any other habitation. The inn had two storeys and a broad verandah round it. A room on the ground floor was decorated with guns, racing-pictures and horn. Rathfelder was described as "the king of landlords". A journalist wrote with enthusiasm in the "Cape Monitor" of riding up to Rathfelder's at noon and enjoying foaming tankards of ale and a glorious steak. Goncharov, the Russian novelist, called there in the

middle of last century and noted the huge cedar tree in the courtyard, fig trees, bananas, grapes, cucumbers and flowers. He was given a breakfast of omelette, tough cold beef and tough hot ham. Huntsmen seemed to have fared better for their usual breakfast was an immense cold turkey. (They hunted the Cape fox or silver jackal.) Prince Alfred was at Rathfelder's in 1860 and Bowler painted the scene when the young royal visitor arrived. One of the prince's companions wrote: "Rathfelder's was a hotel equal to the best of the fast-expiring roadside inns of England when stagecoaches were still in their prime and railways yet were not." It went downhill after Rathfelder's death, however, for Lady Duff Gordon said it was "dirty

and disorderly". The Eaton Convalescent Home now stands on the site.

As I say farewell to the vanished menus and past glories of Cape Town's old hotels I glance wistfully at the prices they charged at the end of last century. Fifteen shillings would see you in a room at the Mount Nelson for a day with all meals included. For twelve and six you could stay at the Queen's, Sea Point, or the Grand in Strand Street. Cogill's, the International, Poole's, the St. George's and the Vineyard at Newlands were all ten bob. If you wished to find comfort without spending too much the White House gave you accommodation in the city with three excellent meals for seven shillings and sixpence. No stars in those days, no air-conditioning or

private bathrooms; but how I wish we could put the clock back.

CHAPTER FOUR
GRACE BEFORE MEAT

*Bless, O Lord, before we dine,
Each dish of food, each cup of
wine,
And bless our hearts, that we may
be,
Aware of what we owe to Thee.*

MAURICE HEALY

CAPE TOWN was for centuries the gastronomic capital of Southern Africa and I record with sorrow the fact that it has lost that distinction. Nowadays the shrewd diner-out is served better in Johannesburg and Durban and, of course, Lourenco Marques. You have to know your way round the Cape Town restaurants to find the elusive old Cape cooking or a trace of English genius. Cape Town has become a

city of steak and chips and you do not escape from tough beef and indigestible potatoes by going to foreign restaurants. Nearly all the menus carry the same badge of shame; the world's most dreadful steaks and the least appetising of all the hundred ways of cooking potatoes.

I still miss the Del Monico, especially the pre-war Del Monico that supplied first-class table-d'hôte meals at reasonable prices. Once the oak-panelled York Room at the Opera House was the place where historic lunches and dinners were held; where generals and politicians, youth and beauty were served among the potted palms by white-clad Indian waiters with black sashes. At another period the railway station was the place to go for a grand

Saturday night dinner. Then the Del Monico gained first place. It was World War II that brought a flood of brave and riotous seafaring customers who ended the social prestige of the restaurant. Some of the drinkers stayed too long at the second-longest bar in the world. The smooth commissionaires became muscular bouncers. No longer was it possible to take one's girl friend for a drink in the palm court.

Cape Town's oldest restaurant, I am glad to say, is still in business. It is the Café Royal, probably the oldest grill-room in South Africa. Back in the eighteen-eighties John Dunn was the proprietor and the restaurant stood next to the old General Post Office in Adderley Street. It had a "Japanese luncheon bar", described as the most elegant in the country; a

smoking room and billiards. An old menu in my collection shows that John Dunn was able to serve pea soup for sixpence, fried fish for sixpence, lamb cutlets and green peas or curry and rice for a shilling. Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding or boiled mutton and caper sauce also cost a shilling and you could have extra vegetables for a tickey. Cheese was sixpence and tea or coffee only a penny.

In my day the Café Royal charged rather more than that but it still gave very good value. The bar was, of course, a sort of club for journalists; there hard-pressed reporters might cash a cheque, though some were luckier than others. There the long-suffering Bubbles laughed merrily and Brownie the barman listened to interminable arguments about the

villainy of editors, news editors, managers and other desirable and undesirable characters. There generations of journalists played the match game and waited for telephone calls that sent them hurrying off on more or less interesting assignments. Sadly I think of departed colleagues who stood beside me in the Café Royal bar before going on to the grill-room for oysters and red meat. With nostalgia I remember Tommy Lawson and his wonderful tricks. He took over the Café Royal early in World War I after ten years on the road as a liquor traveller; and before long the restaurant was known as "Tommy Lawson's". Tommy was a bearded, persuasive man who could forge your signature on a penny with a pen-knife or perform the three card

trick with more skill than a race course sharper.

Fred Junghans was waiter and head waiter at the Café Royal for nearly forty years. He was a clean-shaven, heavily-built man with a light touch when dressing salads. Fred made the salad called "Fred's Special" for many famous people. I never succeeded in learning the whole secret but I can tell you that his green salad consisted of lettuce, tomato and green peppers with a dressing of lemon juice, oil and vinegar, celery, salt, pepper and sugar. Finely-chopped onion and a mashed clove of garlic went in when specially ordered. Fred also had a crawfish salad with the same condiments plus sliced beet, cream and mayonnaise. Finally he prepared a cucumber salad for those who

could not usually digest cucumber. He cut the cucumber in slices, sprinkled it with salt and hung it in a table napkin for one hour while the moisture dripped out. Then he dressed it with white vinegar, pepper, onion and sugar, topped up with fresh cream.

Paul Surrock, another Café Royal waiter, looked exactly like Mussolini. I believe he was a Greek. He was a railway steward for years and had waited on the Royal Family during the 1947 South African tour; a silver matchbox bearing the royal insignia was his memento of the visit. An even more famous Paul at the Café Royal was the great Guiseppe de Paoli. Everyone called him Paul, a great restaurateur who had come up from the lowest work in the kitchen. Paul was one of the few

foreign maitres-d'hotel who took the trouble to master the Cape cuisine. He had worked as a train steward and as chief steward at the old Cape Town station restaurant. He knew what Smuts and Hertzog and Paul Sauer liked. Smuts was fastidious, an epicure in his own way. Grilled snoek with brown butter sauce, new potatoes and rice formed one of his favourite dishes, and he drank beer or brown sherry. Once he remarked: "Paul, when you have lived and eaten as I have done, on the veld and in the saddle, you reach a stage in life when you look forward to comfort and good things to eat." General Hertzog was a hearty eater. He and General Louis Botha and Tielman Roos all enjoyed the traditional Cape dishes: *bobotie*, the famous *bredies* and *gestoofde skaap*

pootjies, fricassee of sheep's' trotters. Tielman Roos also liked iced spanspek with Van der Hum and geelbek with mayonnaise. Paul Sauer preferred a tender fried perlemoen with lemon sauce.

Enough, for the moment, of these dishes for the influential and the wealthy. The finest value I ever found in Cape Town was provided by the Café Diane in Long Street, a little place I have already mentioned. I lunched there every week-day, term after term, while I was at school. Such lunches they gave me that I was able to return to S.A.C.S. with the strength to survive another marvelously boring afternoon. I still pass the Café Diane, but it has another name and it now supplies the steak and chips, fish and chips of the masses. I only came to know the Café

Diane well after I had left school. The *patron* was an immense Frenchman, olive-skinned with a lock of Napoleonic black hair showing below his white chef's hat. Jacques Hugo had been a ship's cook; but in French ships the cook is something more than a mere sea cook. He had been shipwrecked on an Indian Ocean isle, rescued and taken to Mauritius. There he had worked for a time at the famous Port Louis restaurant La Flore Mauricienne. He married an island girl Diane and they had left the overcrowded island and moved across to South Africa to make a little more money.

Many people have made fortunes in Long Street and I believe Jacques and Diane were fairly comfortable when they sold up and sailed for France during the nineteen-twenties. I never

understood how they did it on the prices they charged. Those lunches I spoke of cost one shilling and three pence a day. I often dined at the Café Diane for half-a-crown and every meal was memorable. Not luxurious but absolutely sound. Always there was a *pot-au-feu* simmering on the coal stove; the basic soup of France, a stupendous blend of wonderful flavours; beef and beef bones, carrot and parsnips, onions and garlic. Jacques showed me round his kitchen when he discovered that I was interested. Amid rapturous aromas I gazed upon his burnished copper pots and iron pans, the large clock that had timed a thousand savoury roasts, the long array of knives. “The most important knife - this one,” Jacques declared, picking up a long steel cook’s knife or *couteau de cuisine*, a

tapered knife with a broad heel, a knife for chopping and dicing, slicing meat and jointing poultry. He demonstrated a small stainless vegetable knife, flicking out blemishes expertly; he filleted a fish with a long, thin blade, and he explained the uses of a grooving knife, turning salad vegetables into decorations fit to adorn a fine dish. Crawfish were cheap in those days and Jacques often put on a *bisque* or, at special request, a rich crawfish Newburg fried in butter and finished in sherry and cream. (But that cost more than one and three.) Jacques also had some interesting recipes he had learnt in Mauritius, rice dishes and others that had their own personalities. They have *bredies* in Mauritius but these are different from the Cape *bredies*; Jacques served a

pumpkin *bredie* and also a spinach *bredie*. Sometimes he made a Mauritian *bouillabaise*, using snoek and other Cape fish, tomatoes, onions, chillies, parsley, thyme and crushed ginger, powdered with turmeric. I believe he put all his skill into these dishes to please Diane and remind her of her island home. Jacques could do wonders with the egg plant, making rissoles which embodied chopped onions and garlic, rissoles cooked in olive oil. However, the meals that I remember most vividly at the Café Diane were those welcome lunches when I ate as only a schoolboy can. French onion soup, a cassoulet of haricot beans, pork and mutton and other ingredients and a fruit jelly, one shilling and three pence.

Years passed before I thought of congratulating Jacques on his artistry. Boys take superb meals for granted. But when I grew up and made it clear to Jacques that I appreciated his meals he sat down at my table and revealed his secrets. Up to a point, of course. Jacques admitted that chefs have secrets and he said the secrets usually die with them. He declared that the selection of the day's food was the most important part of the task. When he prodded a fowl or eyed a fish he was like a doctor examining a patient. Jacques had sensitive fingers and a nose that helped enormously. All the time he was buying fish and meat and vegetables he was composing the menus of the day. He also knew when fruit had been picked before it was ripe.

“When I read a recipe I can smell the dish on the stove,” Jacques claimed and I accepted it. He was like a musician hearing a composition as he read the score. His kitchen was a symphony. Sauces? Jacques said the great sauces of France made up the soul of the cuisine. Without them it was impossible to achieve the aim of every conscientious chef, to enhance the natural flavour of each fish or meat, not to smother it. Jacques spoke fondly of the classical foundation sauces, the mayonnaise, *bechamel* and *espagnole*. He sighed for ingredients that were hard or impossible to buy in Cape Town in those days; fresh truffles, fresh garlic. However, he assured me that he could achieve wonders as long as he had cream and egg yolks, herbs and tomato, butter and onion and

above all wine. The most difficult sauce? Jacques said Bearnaise, the proper sauce for fillet of beef.

“Here I do everything myself and Diane looks after the till - by far the best arrangement,” Jacques went on. “I pity the people who have to eat wretched food from unclean kitchens. And it is hard to find a good restaurant – the outside appearance tells you nothing. Often you can go by the aroma. Bad food smells bad. Beware of hashes and leftover dishes marked ‘chef’s special’. Make inquiries before you order. This is a land of chicken, chops and steak, steak, steak. It is wonderful to find a place where they give you something unusual, a superb duckling perhaps or even a pure sausage.”

Yes, I still miss Jacques Hugo. In a different class, interesting in a totally

different way, was a Greek who ran a fruit-shop and café in Kloof Street. He had an unpronounceable name like Chrysikopoulos but we called him Peter because nearly all Greeks are named Peter or Nick. He was a wrinkled old Greek who took in Greek newspapers and decorated his walls with lurid pictures of Greek soldiers and Greek cruisers laying hell into the Turks. Peter's café was a gathering place for other Greeks. They talked excitedly and settled the distant political dramas of Athens to their own satisfaction. Peter served steak and chips, ham and eggs to ordinary customers but he made Greek dishes for his fellow-countrymen.

Greek food will never gain three stars in the Michelin Guide, I imagine, for it is robust peasant grub rather than

gourmet fare. Nevertheless, it is better than Cape steak and chips. Peter used to bake bread, coarse bread and put it in front of his fellow-countrymen steaming hot. They would tear off hunks, dress it with pepper and salt and olive oil and eat it with white cheese and black olives as an appetiser. Then I watched them going into the kitchen to see what was cooking; an old Greek custom. I soon decided to abandon the steak and chips and join the Greeks.

Peter had a charcoal stove. He often made the bean soup called *fasolada* and a pleasant lentil soup. His fish dishes were splendid though few besides his Greek friends would have chosen sea urchins, the sweet sea urchins with purple shells gathered at full moon. Crawfish, which the Greeks call *astakos*, was grilled in the

shell over the charcoal fire. Peter also concocted a fish stew, filling a cauldron with several varieties of fish, herbs and onions, tomatoes and olive oil. Once he dropped a whole octopus into the cauldron amid cries of approval from his Greek patrons. Fried mussels were often on the menu, the *mydia tiganita* which the Greeks enjoy more than the classic French *moules marinière*. (Give me the *moules*.) I liked Peter's moussaka, egg-plant baked in layers with mincemeat and covered with cheese sauce. His meat dishes were simple and inexpensive except on certain days of feasting; then he would have beef turning on a spit, a roast Easter lamb or the traditional sucking-pig. The diners had to bring their own *ouzo*, of course, the milky appetiser that appeals to people who liked

aniseed balls as children. I did not. Nor could I ever accept with genuine pleasure the Greek wine called *retsina*, a white wine flavoured with pine resin. Peter told me the wine was matured in pine casks. I say that the French (and others) know better than to mix the grape with the pine. Peter used lemons in many of his dishes. He was not strong on sweets, though his honey puffs and flaky pastries with nuts and syrup were not to be despised. There was always Turkish coffee, very thick and sweet and served in a copper pot with a long handle.

Black olives preserved in brine came to Cape Town in casks in those days and Peter transferred the olives to small jars. He declared that these Greek olives were far superior to the green Seville olives or the stuffed

manzanillas. Peter also approved of the Greek *kalamata* olives packed in oil and vinegar. Each *kalamata* was slit down one side so that it imbibed the marinade. I heard that Peter took his savings and retired to his home on Ithaca between the wars. No doubt he often thought wistfully of Kloof Street and I hope he never had cause to regret his decision.

Germans have had no difficulty throughout this century in finding their own cuisine in Cape Town; except, of course, during the two world wars, when there was not a *kartoffelsalat* or *pumpernickel* to be seen anywhere. Besides the Deutscher Verein there have been German hotels, bars, cake shops and cafés for decades. One *gemutlich* restaurant in Long Street, decorated with antique guns, was owned not

long after World War II by Baron Von Rapacki-Warnia, former lord of the great Heynewalde estate in Saxmy. The baron ordered supplies, carved the joints and served at the counter while the baroness worked as waitress. This unusual German restaurant displayed heirlooms bearing the Rapacki-Warnia crest, a tablecloth one hundred years old and some fine old silver cutlery. Then there was Ludwig's place in Loop Street. I forgot his surname but it was a good place to go between the wars for German and Austrian food. Ludwig had a delicatessen as well as a café; a most attractive shop with sausages hanging from poles, steel trays bright with fresh, contrasting salads and tins of white asparagus of brands unknown elsewhere in Cape Town. Ludwig explained to me that

asparagus was really the national vegetable of Germany; he declared that every spring his fellow countrymen went mad over *spargel*, the tender stalks of the king of vegetables. One of the great dishes on Ludwig's menu was composed of asparagus, melted butter, grilled bacon, scrambled eggs, sausage, ham and boiled potatoes.

Ludwig was noted for too generous portions but all German restaurants have that failing. He made a formidable steak tartar, one of the few delicacies I have never been able to face: raw beef and onion on toast and a raw egg topped with German caviar. I asked him what it was like and he replied: "Vonderful goot!" This was a standard description, I soon discovered. If you inquired about the paprika veal with rice or

the beef goulash or *kasseler ripchen* it was always: "Vonderful goot!" And indeed it was good in the substantial German way, huge slices of *sauerbraten* garnished with dumplings and potatoes and soused cabbage. I have fond memories of the herring salad with its slices of boiled potatoes, cold meats or minced veal, gherkins, dried apples, beets, peppers, onions and pickles, all properly chilled, served with vinaigrette and decorated with capers and chopped hard-boiled eggs. "Vonderful goot!" Ludwig had no heirlooms but his collection of beer steins was greatly admired.

Portuguese and Madeirans have had their unassuming little cafés and fish and chip shops in Cape Town for the whole of this century. Only in recent years have a few of them opened

more expensive restaurants with fresh tunny and tartar sauce or steaks in clay plates *a la Portugaise*. Madeirans are in the majority in this community and many of them come from one fishing village, Paul do Mar. Most of the island dishes can be prepared here and wicker-covered bottles of Madeiran wine are available. Dinner often starts with either chicken broth or the cold *gaspacho* made from chopped onions, cucumber, red peppers, tomato, lettuce and garlic and laced generously with olive oil. Maybe there will be imported *bacalhau* to follow, dried salt cod served in many ways. Then roast chicken with cheese, and fruit afterwards. You will notice the typical love of colour on your plate; the vivid splashes of tomato and saffron, chick peas, ripe

olives, crawfish in their flaming red shells, pimientos and chillies. An interesting snack which you may be offered with your wine or beer is called *tremocos*, salted lupins. Try *caldo verde*, a soup of mashed potatoes and chopped green cabbage, and also their *cozido*, a stew of beef, pork, sausages and vegetables. Portuguese and Madeirans are usually either market gardeners or fishermen. Their food is close to the soil and the sea.

Dutch food should be conspicuous in the restaurants of the seaport Van Riebeeck founded but for some reason it is hard to find. I would know little of the cuisine of Holland if I had not visited that country, travelled in Dutch ships and dined luxuriously at the Netherlands Club. No doubt there are hotels and cafés

in Cape Town managed by people from Holland but they do not seem to place their traditional dishes on the menu. Cape Town sampled the best cuisine of Holland during the Van Riebeeck festival when the Dutch restaurant offered smoked eels, herrings, wild duck and the finest cheeses. There the renowned thick pea soup was made, rich with smoked sausages and pork. (They called it *snert*.) Knowing epicures also ordered *hete bliksem*, the “hot lightning” casserole of potatoes and celery accompanied by grilled pork sausages and apple sauce. Other delicacies of that brief period, delicacies that seem to have disappeared were *filosoof*, a meat and potato casserole, and the better-known *hutspot met klapstuk* or Dutch boiled dinner, a beef stew with veal

knuckle, oxtail, celery and many vegetables. There was also a dish called *hoppel-poppel* which I failed, unfortunately, to investigate.

Numbers of Italians settled in Cape Town during the nineties of last century. They were sailors, tired of the hard life on board sailing ships; and they simply walked on shore, as Portuguese and Greek sailors had done previously, to found their own community. With these Italians came a taste for *frutta di mare* and *pasta*. They soon had their own fishing boats and caught the fruit of the sea. It was easy to make *pasta*. The Italians stayed on and are still with us, serving steak and chips.

Obviously there is something about the Italian touch in the kitchen that appeals to large numbers of people all over the world. Every other

restaurant in Cape Town seems to be a *trattoria* or somebody's *grotta*. Italians usually keep the prices down as far as possible and nobody goes away hungry. Of course the *gastro-nomia Italiana* deserves higher praise than that; it is filling and fattening but it has its charms. You need a sharp knife for the steak but ravioli needs no razor-edge. Italian restaurants bear a family resemblance yet the dishes are different wherever you go. This variety is due to the fact that Italy is not one country; the regional specialities are endless and even an Italian gourmet travelling in his own land must face many dishes he has never eaten, names on menus that are foreign to him. Rice is the background of Northern Italy, not *pasta*. You find *risotto* cropping up as

often as the meat and rice in a South African country hotel.

Cooking was an art in Italy before the French became supreme in that field. The modern Italian chef likes to present a colourful platter; he has the tomatoes and peppers and green peas and he uses them with pleasant effect. His flavours are less subtle than the French but his restaurant may have more gaiety and atmosphere, even singing waiters. (Can you imagine a singing waiter in Paris?) Italian wines match the simple macaronis and spaghettis. No need to hold up the meal while you discuss the marvellous bouquet; there is none. It is just wine, drinkable wine, to be taken in large quantities with appetising food. The olive oil used largely in cooking is said to be better for you than the

expensive butter of the French. So eat and enjoy yourself - canneloni with meaty Bolognese sauce and grated cheese, veal cutlets, fruit and more cheese. *Viva!*

Yes, you can have *zampone* in Cape Town and *peperonata* and *pizza*. But many a visitor has searched in vain for *wateruintjies* and *bredies*, *springbokvleis en jellie*, *gebraaide tarentaal vleis* or *duifies*. They have also had difficulty in finding those great dishes that are English to the marrow; the incomparable roast meats, proper Yorkshire pudding, the steak-and-kidney. Such plebeian Cockney favourites as jellied eels are absent and even a simple toad-in-the-hole is a rarity. One day, I hope, someone will open an Afrikaans-English restaurant with joints wheeled round on trolleys and where the *boerewors*

is beyond reproach. That man will be a public benefactor.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE HAND OF TIME

Junk shops were far more common than antique showrooms in the Cape Town of my youth and genuine antiques were often to be found among the junk. Now the antique dealer is as common as the cook serving steak and chips in the guise of haute cuisine. Moreover the fringe antiques of today include items I once used. It came as a shock to me recently when I saw an old telephone in an antique gallery, an ornate specimen with hand-cranked magneto "said to have been used by President Kruger". People of my age dislike that sort of relic. They remember cranking them.

Give me the old Cape furniture, the burnished metal and polished timber

in which you recapture the centuries that have passed. Who made these sturdy chests and massive wall cupboards? The names of many Cape silversmiths are known to us; Anton Anreith the woodcarver is famous; but a host of cabinet-makers and other craftsmen have gone beyond recall, leaving masterpieces that bring into a house the power of a Rembrandt painting. Some of these craftsmen were ship's carpenters who came on shore with Van Riebeeck and made the familiar, heavy Dutch furniture in new surroundings. Then the Malays arrived, experts at inlay work and rattan and oriental curves; Malay slaves, blending the solid Dutch tastes of their masters with the dreams of the East Indies. They brought the idea of a dragon's claw

holding a pearl, soon to become the Cape ball-and-claw foot that some admire and others do not. Came the Huguenots with all the French elegance. Daniel Marot has not been forgotten; architect to the Prince of Orange, interior decorator at Hampton Court, the man who advised Sir Christopher Wren; this same Marot influenced the makers of Cape furniture. Perhaps the designs lost a little of their seafaring and farmhouse simplicity at this period but the Huguenot embellishments and upholstery were beautiful. Last on the scene were the English craftsmen who landed early last century, towards the end of the golden age of Cape furniture. They carried not only their tool-boxes but also the ideas of Chippendale and the Adam brothers, Hepplewhite and

Sheraton. So new delicacies arose in decoration; lattice work, oval and heart shapes and the famous Sheraton marquetry.

All these men were true artists in timber. The age of the specialist was still to come. These craftsmen selected a log from the forests and transformed it with primitive tools. They used hand-saws and one man would shape a whole piece of furniture, fixing the brass hinges and locks with pegs and metal rivets. They borrowed from the great designers of Europe without losing the spirit of the Cape. Woodworking machines killed them, though they were still employed in Cape Town during the thirties and forties of last century; and much longer in the country. The simple furniture made in Graaff Reinet can be identified

easily. Swellendam had a band of craftsmen right up to the end of last century. Malay carpenters in Swellendam had their own *hadji* but they scattered at last owing to unemployment. William Moulton was the local cabinet-maker whose furniture is most treasured; he drew on the Langeberg forests and was noted for his inlay work. One of his chess-tables is preserved in the Swellendam museum. There, too, you may see church chairs and a stinkwood lectern made in the early eighteen-hundreds.

Black stinkwood was probably the finest of all the materials used by the old craftsmen, the timber with misty depths regarded by many experts as the greatest furniture wood in the world. Sometimes the dark walnut-coloured stinkwood is mottled with

yellow or gold; the light and shadow of the grain hold the story of a tree that stood for a thousand years. It is not easy to work but it has a mysterious and appealing lustre. Here indeed is a wood fit to rank with Indian teak and the oak of old England. Yellowwood is magnificent but it must be graded below stinkwood. These timbers blend admirably, stinkwood for the framing and yellowwood panels. Yellowwood resembles the light satinwood while stinkwood is hard to distinguish from South American imbuia. Yellowwood was a shipwright's favourite; masts and yards and keels were made of it. You also find yellowwood tables and bedsteads, vats, casks and tubs. The fine red of rooiels, with black markings to break the monotony of the grain, with

white or yellow flecks in some planks, also had a strong appeal. Then there was *wit els*, rather like Outeniqua yellowwood, the choice of those who made picture-frames and boxes. Wild chestnut was not so ornamental but it was used for panels. Camphor grown at the Cape went into boxes and chests as the aroma was supposed to keep out moths. The camphor trees planted by Willem Adrian van der Stel at Vergelegen are still growing there beside the oaks. Assegai-wood, hard as oak and like mahogany in appearance, made handsome furniture; some bright red, often brown or grey. Carpenters noted its “elastic” quality and used it for chairs.

Among the imported timbers were ebony from Mauritius and the lighter ebony with dark stripes (also known

as Coromandel) from Ceylon. Wood-carvers at the Cape loved ebony. Doors and windows were often made of Burma teak while panels of beefwood from the East Indies are seen in many pieces of furniture; they are indeed beef-coloured. Mahogany came from South America in the middle of the eighteenth century and this was the timber used at the Cape in the *linnekas*. This linen press was smaller and less decorative than the armoire; it stood about five feet high, with wooden knobs instead of Cape silver key plates and handles. The finer local woods lent their beauty to beautiful fittings; such rarities as the early butterfly and strap hinges. Holland was the home of great brass-workers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and some of

these men brought their designs to the Cape. When they had created a new and gracious piece of furniture they polished it with linseed oil and wax and brought the beauty of the rich surface to perfection.

Widespread interest in Cape antiques is not so recent as most people imagine. It may come as a surprise even to well informed collectors to learn that Lady de Villiers opened an exhibition of furniture, curios, Huguenot and family relics organised by the Dutch Reformed Church in a Long Street hall thirteen years before the end of last century. Among the hundred dresses on show was one worn by Mrs Paul Roux when she went to an official reception in the seventeen-seventies. Snuff-boxes, scent-bottles and knee-buckles were among the exhibits.

Members of the Le Sueur family lent an iron-headed hammer, carried by an ancestor as part of his disguise when he fled to Holland dressed as a glazier after the Edict of Nantes. Another escape was recalled by a copper plate bearing the De Wit family crest; it was hidden in the boot of an ancestor. Bibles included a Dutch version bound in wood and nearly three centuries old; an English family Bible published in 1519 and a German version from Nuremberg printed in 1736 and weighing twenty-four pounds. A silver salver was displayed by the Van Oudts-hoorns and a Huguenot family lent a racing cup brought to the Cape from France. Tapestry decorated the walls. There was a view of Cape Town worked in grass. Evidently the newspapers realised that this was an

historic occasion and one journalist commented: "Many of these relics will pass into other hands."

Probably the first really important antique show in Cape Town was held as far back as 1908 in the City Hall. It filled four large rooms. Some of the furniture, worth a fortune today, must indeed have passed into other hands; but many items can be traced with ease. Groot Schuur, for example, supplied a seventeenth century rosewood *kist* and another made of chestnut and thought to be of Spanish origin. The oldest *kist*, however, was a Flemish chest lent by Mr Woodhead; this had sunk panelling and portrait medallions made of oak, and 1590 was said to have been the year of manufacture. The original Dutch *kas* was a sea-chest; and scores of them, if not

hundreds, must have been carried on shore when Van Riebeeck landed. They also served as dower-chests in Holland, filled with linen for the dowry of each daughter. The lines were severe for the chest might also be used as a travelling-trunk and no decoration was needed. When the *kist* was made at the Cape the design was even more simple. Different timbers were often used: mahogany, camphor, satinwood and sandalwood from the East, giving out fragrant perfumes. Poor people often had only the *kist* for their clothes. The chest-of-drawers, linen cupboard and armoire came later. How do the experts distinguish between the Holland *kas* and the *kist* made at the Cape? The timber is a useful guide for carpenters in Europe depended largely on oak. Delicate brass fittings

also suggest a European origin. Ball-shaped feet are found on chests of various origins. The yellowwood wagon chest is a true descendant of the Dutch chest but the wood reveals the Cape craftsmen. Most fascinating of all these chests are the jewellery boxes and other miniatures built to stand on tables or to be stored in a full-sized kist. Modern reproductions of the antique *kist* are extremely popular.

Most impressive of all the fine pieces of Cape furniture was the armoire or linen-cupboard. Major William Jardine, famous Africana collector, sent a splendid satinwood and stinkwood armoire from his farm near Sir Lowry's Pass to the City Hall exhibition. This armoire had secret drawers, a carved cornice, silver mounts and claw feet. It was made in

the middle of the eighteenth century, during the most gracious period of Cape craftsmanship. Armoire is a word derived from the Armoire people of Brittany and the original design was French. The pediment was added at the Cape and this seems to have been inspired by the farmhouse gable. Very old armoires are small; but as larger houses were built so the craftsmen made massive cupboards to stand under high ceilings and to form a contrast with the whitewashed walls. Cape silversmiths contributed handles and other beautiful fittings. The armoire is a most distinctive type of Cape furniture and this piece is often compared with the finest European work of the same period. Cape craftsmen had graduated from their earlier crude designs and were

turning out their masterpieces. You do not often see a Cape armoire in England; they are so large that few owners would care to pay the freight. However, a grand eighteenth century stinkwood armoire was sold at Sotheby's in London some years ago. Made in Wellington, it had been in the possession of the Malherbe family at the farm De Hoop for at least a century; and no one could say why it had travelled to London. The armoire had a moulded pediment and three carved cartouches. Antique collectors abroad know nothing of the Cape armoire and so it fetched only eighty pounds. Bidders would have paid two or three times as much at a South African sale. Armoires are too large for my flat and so I select as my favourite the armoire type of display cabinet with panes instead of

doors under the gable. My mother left me a superb specimen. It fits into a corner and adorns the room with the beauty of its stinkwood. I can see my silver and my wine-glasses against a background of flowered wallpaper. No doubt it was once filled with valuable china.

Cape furniture craftsmen seldom designed flat-topped desks. "Bible desks" with slanting tops on stands are also rare as they have not been made here for centuries. They were once known as "Bible boxes" and under the lid the Dutch family Bible was kept. Often there were drawers. The legs may give an indication of the period as some are tapered, others cabriole. Cape desks of this type were not heavily decorated. An inlaid ivory star is seen in some lids.

Cape four-poster beds must be placed among the rarities because so many of the posts were sawn off when the canopy was no longer needed. Do you know the purpose of the four poster? Some say it was a sort of ship's bunk that came on shore with Van Riebeeck; but I cannot accept that origin. Clearly this huge bedstead was designed in the days before ceilings. Dust, insects and even larger creatures fell from the thatch; hence the canopy. The side-curtains gave privacy when rooms were shared. Very early examples seem to have disappeared but there are a few grand four-posters two hundred years old. Some are mahogany, others stinkwood, with riempie or cane thongs to support the mattress. You find carved boards at head and foot and

fluted posts. Four-posters were made so that they could be taken apart for transport.

Tables and chairs are fairly easy to find. The old Cape craftsmen made a wide variety of sizes and styles, using stinkwood or mahogany for most of them. Collectors are pleased to find gate-legged tables as those are rare. Large yellowwood refectory tables were made in the country; and if they have turned stinkwood legs then they belong to the nineteenth century. They had a carved, cane-back Spanish chair with spiral legs at the 1908 show. Major Jardine, who lent it, said that it had been used by Governor Tulbagh, and that it was a late seventeenth century design. Seventeenth century chairs, made at the Cape from local timbers, are not unknown; they may be studied at

Groot Schuur and in a few museums. A furniture repairer at Paarl bought a seventeenth-century dining room chair in 1929 for a few shillings. It was teak, fastened with wooden pins. No doubt it had been in the district for centuries and had come from a farm loft. Tub-chairs with low cane backs and fluted legs are typical of the work of Cape craftsmen. The so-called “slave chairs”, made on farms, have *riempies*, as cane was not easily available in the country. Huguenot chairs reached their most artistic forms in the late eighteenth century, with the craftsmen using stinkwood and making tall and graceful chairs with cabriole legs. There were also the old dining-room chairs known as “Tulbagh chairs” with square legs. Later versions of this chair reveal the Sheraton influence and these have

tapered legs. Tulbagh was the home of a group of country artisans who influenced the Cape antique furniture strongly. You also find Cape chairs of the “Raffles” type, named after Sir Thomas Raffles, an official of the English East India Company. These rosewood chairs came to the Cape from Java and local carpenters followed the design. “Burgomaster chairs” were made at the Cape; round “compass” chairs with cane seats and six legs banded together. Barbers were fond of this type.

Cape wall mirrors of full-length are not often seen in showrooms and they have a scarcity value. The upright mirrors with mahogany frames that stood on dressing-tables are less expensive. Simple wash-stands and dressing-tables of yellowwood are not so rare, but the

more decorative pieces used by the rich are uncommon.

Among the oddities at the 1908 exhibition was a penny-in-the-slot box from an old Cape inn. It had a large slot to take the huge “cartwheel” pennies of long ago. When the penny dropped the lid flew open and there was a small plug of tobacco as the reward. More entertaining, I think, were the antique musical-boxes that are often to be seen at these shows. (They had a jewel-encrusted musical-box, said to have been a gift from Napoleon to Marie Antoinette, on view at a recent Cape Show.) Watchmakers were turning out the pioneer musical boxes towards the end of the eighteenth century. They played tunes on bells and were known as *carillons a musigue*. Musical snuff-

boxes, fans, smelling-bottles and umbrella-handles followed. Fine music, including operatic selections, could be played on the musical-boxes sold in the middle of last century. The principle was simple enough; clockwork rotated a brass barrel with steel pins that twanged the teeth of a metal comb. These ingenious machines gripped the public imagination until the coming of the phonograph; then the musical box was doomed. One charming example survived in an hotel bar in a village near Cape Town; there, in recent years, the drinkers were still paying to hear a large disc-type musical-box rendering old tunes: “The bell goes ringing for Sarah” and “The man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo”. In a different class were those life-size birds in cages,

canaries and others, that moved their wings, turned on their perches and trilled with such realism that people gazed on them with puzzled eyes and were sometimes deceived.

I return again to 1908 at the City Hall. There was a sedan chair of mahogany and satinwood made at the Cape late in the eighteenth century and described as “comfortable enough but not built for large people”. Sir Henry and Lady de Villiers, Mrs Fairbridge and Miss Cloete lent a number of silver exhibits: coffee and sugar-pots, pepper-boxes, trays, a muffineer or castor for sprinkling sugar on muffins, a toddy ladle and gravy dish. No doubt there were items of old Cape silver in the collection. English ironstone plates used by Napoleon on St. Helena were shown

with a green salt-glaze pip kin (small earthenware pot) unearthed in Adderley Street. A spinning-wheel of beech and mahogany and a *kappie* made for the first Dopper baby born at the Cape were other items. In the art section were steel engravings of Cape governors, old Dutch samplers and early water-colours showing the Parade with a fountain and canal.

Clocks were almost unknown in Cape Town until the middle of the eighteenth century. People used the sand-glass and waited for the bell time signals from the Castle. However, the invention of the pendulum clock by the Dutch craftsman Huygens brought clocks to the Cape; but it was not until the seventeen seventies that the Dutch Reformed Church clock showed the time. Very old clocks were made with only one

hand, for in those leisurely days it was enough to know the hour.

Those who possess antique clocks made at the Cape are the owners of great rarities. Professor G. E. Pearse, architect and authority on old Cape furniture, described a seventeenth century Cape clock owned by Dr H. B. Thom, rector of Stellenbosch University. It bears the name of the maker on the brass face: Johann Michael Junck, Cabo de Goede Hoop. Junck was a German who reached the Cape in 1765 and worked for the Dutch East India Company for three years as a locksmith. He then made and repaired clocks until his death three years later. Dr Thom has the only known example of Junck's superb work. The case is of stinkwood, yellowwood and ebony and the

decorations include Atlas supporting a globe with winged figures on each side. There is also a seascape, a ship under sail, a woman and a shepherd playing a flute. Mrs M. N. Morrison traced another early Cape clock-maker, Johan de Jonghe. A fine example of his work was a long-case grandfather clock in stinkwood with silver decorations and escutcheons. It has on the dial a seascape, the name of the craftsman and "Kaaap de Goede Hoop-1775". This clock was taken to Holland and was still in working order after World War II.

Very few grandfather clocks were made at the Cape. Mrs Suzanne van Rensburg, a Pretoria antique furniture collector, traced one with a dial of Cape silver that fetched over a thousand guineas at a Boland sale some years ago. The only famous

maker of grandfather clocks at the Cape arrived in 1842, a Welsh widower named William Jones. After seven years in Cape Town he moved to Port Elizabeth and opened his first jewellery shop there. Three of his grandfather clocks have been identified, two in Graaff-Reinet and one in Jansenville. Mrs van Rensburg mentions two other immigrants from Britain named Rhodes and Raulstone who made a few simple long case clocks at the Cape.

Some clocks have become Africana by virtue of long residence. Such a one is the grandfather clock from Amsterdam (dated between 1700 and 1725) that ticks in the Koopmans de Wet Museum. The face of solid brass. It shows the days, months and phases of the moon. Another fine old clock shown at the City Hall

exhibition more than sixty years ago was one owned by Napoleon and brought to Cape Town from St. Helena. That was a London clock by Perrira, ebony with brass mountings. I have a description of another valuable London clock, made by the Rowley brothers about a century ago, which came to South Africa after World War I. When the clock strikes the hour an ornamental blind is raised and four men are revealed, dressed in period costume and ringing hand-bells in turn. A blacksmith in Elizabethan dress taps the minutes. The clock records the day of the week, the date and name of the month and adjusts itself at leap years. I have also heard of a pre Victorian clock set in the middle of an English country landscape. As the hour strikes a coach appears with

horses at the gallop and then vanishes round a boulder. Other clocks are fitted with animated figures that make the cuckoo look silly. Monkeys in scarlet tunics play the flute and organ and dance jigs and minuets. Mr Jacques Arzul, a French musician who became a clock repairer, settled in Stellenbosch not long ago and specialised in the repair of antique clocks. Word of his skill went round the town and countryside, attics and trunks were searched and soon the horologist was overwhelmed with work. He had never guessed that so many fine antique clocks had survived in this district. Among the clocks he restored to the original condition was a Dutch grandfather that had been in the Van Breda family since early in the eighteenth century. This clock

was valued recently at two thousand Rands. Some of Cape Town's most remarkable clocks were lent for display in the Western Province pavilion at the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg. Professor C. F. M. Saint supplied a seventeenth century lantern clock. Major Jardine lent a grandfather clock from Amsterdam with a Cape-made stinkwood case. Most of the old grandfather clocks at the Cape had oak, walnut or satinwood cases. A collection of clocks in the estate of Mr E. E. Attwood, sold at Claremont in 1939, included a lantern clock with open face and large strike bell, and this was dated back to the seventeenth century. Mr Attwood also owned water clocks with metal buckets. A Jonathan Bowker clock of 1649 bore the inscription: "Showe ye fleeting

houres of day ... as one by one they passeth away". There was also a Biblical clock depicting Abraham sacrificing his son, with a goat waiting to take the place of the child.

Cape glass is recent, Victoriana one might say rather than Riebeeckiana. Yet many collectors are glad to find Cape glass. Of course there was glass from Holland in the early days; old families possess cut-glass decanters, wine and liqueur glasses that have remained unbroken since the eighteenth century. I have heard of a *bokaal* or goblet bearing the coat-of-arms of General Janssens. At the Castle there are authentic glasses with the V.O.C. emblem of the Dutch East India Company. But the only Cape-made glass earlier than the present century was blown at Observatory in the eighteen-eighties.

A company was formed and a master craftsman named Jones arrived at the head of a band of skilled glass blowers. These men turned out pickle-jars and vases, wine, champagne and custard glasses, tumblers, finger-bowls, water jugs and decanters. Some of their more expensive efforts were decorated with a fern-leaf emblem by which their work may now be identified. Unfortunately there was a strong prejudice against local products at that period and the Observatory factory had to close down. Another enterprise started at Glencairn, where there is an unlimited supply of white sea sand. This sand stung the faces of the glass blowers; they refused to live in the windswept valley and soon returned to England. Examples of

Glencairn glass must be extremely rare today.

Antique dealers will handle anything likely to show a profit. I have already mentioned the “Kruger telephone” and this was not the most remarkable exhibit I saw in that shop. The dealer also had a barrel-organ over a century old. He said that in the ox-wagon days an enterprising smous took this barrel-organ along with him into the far interior and brought the farm people and others round his wagon when he turned the handle. After a long and profitable trek he had sold it to a native chief. I would like very much to know how that old street piano came back to Cape Town.

Only by sheer chance will you find a piece of Sandveld antique furniture in a dealer’s shop or sale room. Do

you know the Sandveld? It is the dry, remote, fascinating country between the Cedarberg mountains and the Cape west coast. Sandveld people cling to their heirlooms. Seldom do these four-poster beds, cupboards and other articles equal the beauty of the stinkwood and yellowwood furniture made by craftsmen in Cape Town, Graaff-Reinet and elsewhere; the Sandveld style is simple and almost crude but with the charm of a strong and honest job.

You find Sandveld furniture on the spot, in the thatched houses of Clan-william, in the homesteads to the north of the Berg River, in cottages that seem to be waiting among the dunes for a future Wenning or Pierneef to recognise their magic. Experts like Dr A. M. Oberholzer and Mr M. Baraitser identify these

little-known pieces by the timbers used, the Cedarberg timbers. The light yellow Cedarwood resembles yellowwood but it has a sweet and unmistakable scent. The *waboom* supplies dowels to pin the Sandveld furniture. Chairs are made of *lemoenhout* from the orange groves of the Olifants River valley. Thin *riempie* seats are the rule in a land where goats are more common than cane. Local craftsmen seem to have found tables difficult though the reddish *kareeboom* was selected for a few rare specimens. Other furniture timbers are wild olive, wild fig, mulberry and syringa. Fine Cedarwood chests are to be found, some made early last century. Perhaps the most typical Sandveld items are the wooden kitchen tubs, casks, *waterbalies* and butter churns.

Away in the land of the Outeniquas and around Oudtshoorn the collector may still find the typical stinkwood and yellowwood furniture of the area. This is the home of the *jongmans kas*, a clothes-chest of unusual design. On a farm an expert collector identified a copper-nailed kist three hundred years old. Kitchen tables and oupa armchairs still await buyers, but you must realise that most owners know the full value of such relics.

How do you form a collection of antique furniture nowadays without the aid of a dealer? Well, I am told that the Western Cape is still the most promising area though you must expect to find fewer treasures and pay far more than the agents sent out by Cecil John Rhodes before last century ended. Mrs Suzanne van

Rensburg drove about the country glancing at stoep furniture and stopping when she noticed an old riempie bench. Sometimes the owner of the bench had other interesting pieces indoors. She also visited auction rooms and second hand dealers in the villages. Coach-houses, lofts and cellars on farms were obvious places to search. Coloured people sometimes parted with rickety, shabby antiques that Mrs Van Rensburg restored to their former beauty. This is a fascinating occupation, profitable for the shrewd collector. When you buy antiques you have something that will never wear out; and something more for those with a little imagination. You buy the power to look back down the centuries and see in the warm timber the people of the past.

Collectors of antique firearms and other weapons are, of course, in a class by themselves. Some are specialists; others keep a sharp lookout for anything from a cannon to a pistol; and all of them prefer muzzle-loaders to breech-loaders. In the Cape Peninsula they have every chance of studying the whole range of explosive weapons, from the carronades of the old navigators to the twelve-o'clock gun.

I first met one of these flintlock and gunpowder enthusiasts in the newspaper office soon after I had started work as a reporter. His name was F. W. Hawkins and like many of that ilk he had a military background. My own knowledge of firearms at that time was confined to the service rifle and the machine-guns fitted to the primitive aeroplanes of the period;

and I was certainly no expert. Hawkins snorted at the mention of Vickers and Lewis guns; he could show me something more interesting. He had just won a hobbies competition and it was my task to describe the collection he had built up during a quarter of a century. "There is in the instrument of death a sort of fascination, possibly morbid, which appeals to the gun collector," Hawkins started. "I am always on the alert for specimens. Some have come to me as presents, others by barter or purchase. Let us examine each item."

Oldest of these treasures, I remember, was a pistol weighing ten pounds. According to Hawkins it had been the property of an early Dutch governor. The heavy pistol fell from its rack at the Castle one evening and nearly killed the governor's wife. The

governor had the offending pistol built into a wall so that it would not fall again. There it was found by accident towards the end of last century when some masonry crumbled away. Hawkins, who was serving at the Castle, secured the prize. I wondered how the story had come down to him after so many years but he refused to be cross-examined.

Hawkins had two light cannon mounted in brass and fired by hammer and percussion caps. I think they were saluting cannon from ships. An Afghan firelock, seven feet long, was in perfect order. Hawkins had bought it at a sale of unwanted court relics; the gun had been produced as evidence at a murder trial. A little shotgun with carved ebony stock had been owned by

Chief Moshesh, founder of the Basuto nation. Hawkins had a rifle with a weird mechanism, inlaid with gold and silver and said to have been made for an Indian prince. The design appeared to be a cross between breech and muzzle loader and even Hawkins had difficulty in opening it. Hawkins also showed me several examples of the work of the Bothas, those famous Cape Town gunsmiths who set up in business early last century in Boerenplein, later Riebeeck Square. They were advertising "plain and rifled gun-barrels, made in London" in the "Cape Town Gazette" in 1816 and members of the family were still in business a century later. The name of S. F. Botha has been found on guns in far places from the Cape to Angola. (I saw one of his guns in

Ovamboland, an old-fashioned shotgun with his name carved deeply in the butt.) Frederik Botha was celebrated for his *sterloop* rifles, a favourite flint and percussion muzzle-loader used by the *voortrekkers*. This rifle had a silver star on the barrel and the kick was so terrific that a boy only became a man when he could fire it. I also saw in the Hawkins collection fine specimens of the *roer* and *sanna*; no display of South African firearms is complete without these formidable guns. "*Die boer en sy roer*" suggests the traditional picture of the old warrior and hunter who seldom wasted a shot. Of course there were many types of both these guns. The *roer* has been defined as an elephant gun but it was not so very heavy. Major Geoffrey Tylden, the authority on South

African firearms, described the roer of the late eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century as a flintlock, often with a hair-trigger, a barrel as long as forty-eight inches and a stout stock. A fine roer complete with ramrod, bullet-moulds, powder horn and pouch is a show-piece in any collection. The nickname sanna was usually applied to the long smoothbore flintlock which had its heyday in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

Lord Charles Somerset sent to England for double-barrelled carbines of Westley Richards make and these were sold in Cape Town at four pounds apiece. Rawbone the gunsmith unpacked Colt repeating rifles soon after the middle of last century, Grainger & Son of Grahamstown were making good rifles in the

eighteen-seventies. Natives clung to Tower muskets and other gaspipe trade guns; but the Brown Bess was doomed, the *bloublaser*, the *snaphaar* and other old firearms became obsolete. A pity they were not sent to museums or destroyed. Traders sold them by the hundred to natives and some of these guns were so flimsy that they exploded and killed the users. Gordon Cumming, the red-bearded Scottish hunter, bought muskets at sixteen pounds a case (twenty in a case) and exchanged each gun with the natives for ivory worth thirty pounds.

Collectors of muzzle-loaders and other old weapons now have the same problems as antique furniture collectors. Owners do not part gladly with their heirlooms. Once a gun that was “definitely used at Blood River”

would change hands for a few shillings; now the prices are high. One collector takes a superb restored muzzle-loader with him as bait and this arouses so much interest in the countryside that owners are proud to deal with a man who treats guns with such respect. Struik the Africana dealer discovered a catalogue showing prices of gun collectors' items early this century. Powder flasks, now almost unobtainable, were twenty-six shillings a dozen. Shotguns, bullet moulds and powder measures with ebony handles were absurdly cheap. Muzzle-loaders and bayonets were offered as pokers at a shilling apiece. Auction prices at a Cape Town sale a few years ago formed a strong contrast. A copper powder flask decorated with a shooting scene fetched seven guineas while a Tower musket

went for eight guineas. Dress and cavalry swords ran up to ten guineas. A flintlock blunderbuss with a brass barrel was sold for over fifty guineas. Collectors of "edge weapons" like to find anything from a Viking sword to a stiletto. At an exhibition in Cape Town a few years ago members of the South African Arms and Armour Society showed rapiers and sabres, a *kukri* from Nepal, breastplates and helmets. A French flintlock smooth-bore made in the eighteenth century had been found in the Blaauwberg dunes and was possibly used during the battle.

Cannon were landed at the Cape long before Van Riebeeck's settlement. Small cannon found by Hottentots and Bushmen in wrecked ships were carried away inland. English mariners left two cannon on Dassen

Island and these were transported to Robben Island by order of Van Riebeeck “so that the Portuguese, French and English may not remove the Company’s sheep and play pranks there”. Van Riebeeck mounted five cannon on the ramparts of his mud fort. He gazed wistfully at the eland and *hartbees* and lamented the fact that they were beyond cannon range. He had thousands of pounds weight of gunpowder while his men were longing for meat.

Cannon from ships found their way up country. A seventeenth-century ship’s cannon known as “Ou Grietje” (after the wife of an English settler named Findlay) was once the only piece of artillery owned by the Orange Free State. It was used in the Basuto wars of the eighteen-fifties and sixties. Free State burghers

aimed the historic gun at their Transvaal opponents during the Renoster river trouble but after two misfires the Free Staters decided that it was a sign that brother should not fight brother. “Ou Grietje” now stands in the grounds of the Smithfield courthouse. The gun also appears in the place of honour on the Smithfield coat-of-arms. The origin of this old gun will never be known but the story may have been as romantic as the later episodes in which it played a part.

Two small bronze saluting cannon of the middle seventeenth century are owned by the Stellenbosch municipality. They are of Portuguese make with Cape gun-carriages. No one knows how they reached Stellenbosch but there are theories. I heard long ago that the guns were found in

a Bushman cave, high in the mountains of the Stellenbosch district. Leibbrandt the archivist, however, stated that the guns were handed over to General Beresford after the Battle of Blaauwberg. These guns, described by Leibbrandt as “Lilliputian artillery”, fired salvoes on the Braak when distinguished visitors arrived in Stellenbosch. They have been displayed on many important occasions and in 1936 they were sent to Johannesburg for the Empire Exhibition.

Mr William Fehr, owner of so many Africana treasures, had a handsome brass and copper saluting cannon from a Saldanha Bay wreck. In the Castle collection there is a cannon with the VOC monogram dated 1748, dredged up by a trawler from

three hundred fathoms to the southwest of Cape Point.

Mr Henry Adams, a Cape Town treasure hunter who employed divers from the middle of last century onwards, recovered two brass guns from a wreck near the present Llandudno in the Cape Peninsula. He sent them to London because of their value as antiques and sold them for one thousand pounds. Adams also employed divers on the wreck of *Het Huis te Cruyenstein* at Oudekraal. They brought up a Dutch brass cannon dated 1694, weighing five thousand pounds and stamped with the maker's name, Jasper van Erpecom.

Sea and land still give up these indestructible relics. Houses more than two hundred years old were pulled down near the old Treaty

House at Woodstock early this century and the site of a fort was revealed. An old cannon mounting was all that remained of the fort. Drainage gangs and demolition parties have dug up guns in many parts of Cape Town. Some have been set up as gateposts or bollards at the docks and others are lying in the South African Museum grounds. The heavy barrel of a small cannon was unearthed on the eastern side of the Castle a few years ago. Mr W. J. Bongers sent details to Holland and had the gun identified as a carronade used on board ship at the end of the seventeenth century. He had it mounted on a wheeled carriage of authentic design. This will not be the last old Cape cannon to see daylight after long years underground.

“The Cape Peninsula is a rich field for study compared with the rest of South Africa,” declared Colonel L. G. F. Wolf, M.C., a leading collector, not long ago. “Most of the pieces are in the possession of collectors who will not part with them. Cannon litter the Peninsula, from ancient muzzle-loaders to guns used in the Western Desert in World War II” As you might expect, there are cannon at Simonstown, cannon with stories. You find small longboat guns captured from Portuguese slavers. Below the lawn at Admiralty House there are two large Portuguese cannon bearing the royal arms and dated 1614 and 1623. It is believed that these were among the guns brought to Simonstown by British men-o’-war after capturing pirate ships. Dutch soldiers left cannon in



"Cannon litter the Peninsula, from ancient muzzle-loaders to guns used in the Western Desert in World War II"

the forts called Boetselaar and Zoutman, built at the end of the eighteenth century. The shot-heating furnace has been preserved. An old gun named Blaauwberg, a muzzle-loader with a diameter of three feet, is still mounted in the disused Middle North Battery.

Muzzle-loading cannon for the defence of Cape Town were replaced by Armstrong guns over a century ago. Fort Knokke was the first battery to be equipped with the new guns and the governor attended a successful demonstration when shells were fired. Old ways of warfare gave way to the new. Several years later a Mr Orgill designed an armoured ox-wagon with a rifle proof gallery at the top for a gun. This fortress on wheels would indeed delight any gun collector if only it had not vanished without

trace. Perhaps the gallery was not rifle-proof after all.

CHAPTER SIX

STREET OF A THOUSAND STORIES

CAPE TOWN has always had its share of romantic and unusual shops. I came under the spell of shop-windows at an early age and the magic of a strange display still has a strong influence over me. As a schoolboy I was an incorrigible window-shopper, especially in Long Street, the magic mile of Long Street. Here indeed was a street of a thousand stories. One of the most remarkable shops I studied there more than half a century ago was devoted entirely to objects made from paraffin tins. Those were the days before petrol pumps and electric stoves. You bought petrol and paraffin in tins, a gallon or four gallons at a time, and the whole of South Africa seemed to be devoted to finding uses for the

empty tins. Shacks and dog kennels were built of paraffin tins. More prosperous folk painted the tins green and used them for plants on the stoep; and such tins often had artistic scrollwork. Ferns hung from the roof in similar tins.

However, you needed a pretty good tin-opener or shears to produce such ambitious efforts. The shopkeeper who specialised in paraffin tins offered handsome umbrella stands and decorative lanterns. The engine-driver and fireman taking food to the footplate could purchase useful black-painted paraffin-tin skoff boxes. You could select a comfortable tin for fowls to lay eggs in and another for use as a drinking-trough. Tin strips were on sale for hanging in fruit-trees; they jingled pleasantly and kept the birds away. Paraffin tins served as

buckets. In tapless areas the man with a pole over his shoulder, a paraffin tin full of water at each end, was a common sight. Hawkers transported fruit in tins. That shop in Long Street suggested that the daily life of Cape Town would collapse without the essential paraffin tin.

I also remember a shop filled with the products of a broom pioneer named Ingle. He must have made a small fortune by supplying this simple article of a type which had previously been imported. Ingle had to send to the United States for seed and persuade local farmers to plant it and grow the grass. The timber industry at Knysna supplied the right sticks for handles. Early this century Ingle was selling thousands of brooms a month.

A penny went a long way in Long Street before World War I and that was just as well. I bought a long strip of liquorice for a penny, a bar of chocolate or a couple of sugar sticks with tigerish stripes. There were penny whistles for boys and penny dolls for girls. Factories in Germany turned out toy soldiers at a penny each and I only wish they had stuck to that harmless occupation. Penny Bazaars sold a packet of writing paper with envelopes or even children's books for the mighty penny. A great favourite, a typical Cape Town delicacy in those days and long afterwards, was the penny polony. This humble yet satisfying item was known among the coloured people as a "redskin". Red it was on the outside, the vivid colour hiding mysterious ingredients. It was good

value, better value than the penny transfers that came off on one's hand and the penny Japanese "flowers" that blossomed in a glass of water.

Naturally I was drawn again and again to the amusement arcade in Long Street filled with penny-in-the-slot machines. This form of entertainment has never died out and I often wonder whether such Edwardian peepshow smash-hits as "What the Butler Saw" are still on view. Do you know what the butler really saw? Well, the penny dropped and the lady of the manor entered the hall, gave her coat to the butler and disappeared into her bedroom. Now the butler bent to the keyhole. Garments were seen dropping on to a chair, there was a brief glimpse of my lady's bare shoulder and then the lights went out. After that discon-

certing finale I refused to invest another penny in "The Chambermaid's Secret". The machine selling butterscotch gave more satisfaction. Pinball machines and juke boxes had not yet been invented. There was an automatic "love test" which told you whether you were fickle, affectionate, cold, passionate, romantic, kissable or glamorous. But I do not think anyone dreamt that a time would come when a coin in the slot would provide clean laundry, silk stockings, books, a shoe shine, personal accident insurance or a hot meal. Cape Town had shops in Van Riebeeck's time but they were not shops in the modern sense. People did their business in the homes of the tradesmen. Henning Huysing the first butcher and Thomas Mulder the first baker sold their wares in their own

living-rooms and kitchens. Early last century there were forty-two small retail shops in Cape Town but no shop-windows. Rose van Bougies made candles in Spin Street; there were bonnet and basket makers and a man who repaired watches. But a writer of doggerel named Frederick Brookes complained in the eighteenth-twenties: "Cape Town wants a good poulterer's shop, a regular fruiterer's establishment, a good beefsteak and chop house at one o'clock each day, shelter for the sale of vegetables and regular stalls and arrangements." Nevertheless the stores in the Heeren-gracht and elsewhere sold hard and soft goods, wine and tobacco. Advertisements in the newspapers reveal a fair range of articles. Retail shopkeepers had wrought-iron lanterns over their doors to show they

were in business. By the middle of last century the British nation of shopkeepers had sent enough immigrants to bring Cape Town up-to-date in shop-keeping. A newspaper recorded: "Cape Town with its omnibuses, cabs and elegant shops is gradually partaking more of the character of an English city." A transition of this sort is hard to trace, however, and there were others who saw Kaapstad as a town Dutch in atmosphere after half a century of British occupation.

When I came on the scene many shopkeepers followed English fashions in the customs of their trades. Long Street butchers wore the straw hats and blue and white overalls of Clapham and Kew; their counters of unpolished timber were scrubbed white; they sprinkled their floors with

sawdust. Pigs often held apples in their mouths. Turkeys wore neck feathers like boas and their plump white thighs reminded some customers of a row of Tiller girls. Fat sheep kept the wool on their tails. Brine tubs were filled with briskets and silversides of beef and bellies of pork. Bacon was cured in the shop. Bladders were filled with lard and sausages were made by hand. The rubicund butcher commanded a small army of busy slaughter men and shop men, apprentices and errand boys. It was a meaty world for there was no refrigeration in the shop and everything seemed to be on view; huge red sides of beef, festoons of sausages, mountains of mutton. In their stalls behind the shop champed the butcher's horses.

Horse brasses, those splendid ornaments still to be seen on the harness of fish carts and fruit carts, were not collector's pieces in those days. I saw in a saddler's window harness mounted with artistic brass and silver. The hawker could buy a set of fancy harness for his cart for about seven pounds; everything from martingale to saddle rings, from nose band to terret. Most of the commemorative brasses, those issued for Queen Victoria's Jubilee and others, have gone into collections. The modern Cape Town hawker adorns his horse with regimental badges and knobs from brass bedsteads.

Milk carts rattled noisily down Long Street with their large metal churns. Milk was tapped into pewter cans, more or less hygienically. Dairies

were richly tiled and some had cows on the premises. More exciting were the bakeries, with the magic and magnificent aromas that stop you dead in your tracks while you breathe in deeply. Van Riebeeck allowed the first local baker to go into business “to make and sell for the convenience of the public all kinds of pastry, roasted and boiled foods of all sorts, small cakes, cracknels and other pastry”. Nevertheless most Cape Town people were baking their own bread early last century. In the eighteen-twenties came Richard Attwell, who made bread and biscuits on a large scale. Bakeries show more individuality, perhaps, than other shops for each nation has its own taste in bread and Cape Town has drawn bakers of many races. Today you can find the

long golden flutes of French bread for people who like crust above all; and the flaky horn-shaped croissants and brioches with ball shaped tops. Old-fashioned cottage loaves are there in the window beside pretzels flavoured with caraway and poppy seed. You can buy plaited loaves, rye bread, potato bread that is said to keep fresh and taste better than other varieties, Kaiser rolls and sour black bread. Always there is the warm nostalgic aroma that never loses its charm for mankind.

One also inhaled gratefully in hot weather the smell of water when the water cart passed. This four-wheeled tank, hauled by a horse, had a contraption in the rear that spurted the welcome stream and settled the dust. Another ancient odour came out of the tiny dens of the cobblers.

They sat there on stools wearing scarred leather aprons, hammering and stitching and sending the rough leather smell beyond their doorways.

South Africa has always been a medicine loving country. Witch-doctors and chemists have supplied the demand from the earliest days. For sentimental reasons a few Cape Town chemists have clung to those enormous glass jars that were once the emblems of their trade; jars holding liquids of pure red and blue, green and yellow. But the atmosphere of medieval sorcery has departed. Some of them still have drawers labelled Sang. Drac (dragon's blood) and R. Serpent (serpentaria root) but they would prefer to sell you antibiotics or sulphonamides.

Cape Town's first apothecaries had their shop in the Castle. Jan Casper

Rigter, an early chemist, ran away into the veld "in a fit of madness" but returned after three days. Probably they gave him a dose of his own nasty medicine to bring him to his senses. When the "Cape Town Gazette" appeared very early last century people became aware of the remedies available. Floris Volsteedt ran a chemist's shop in his home in Strand Street and offered the public Peruvian bark (quinine) and brimstone, alum, borax, sal-ammoniac and isinglass. He bought up the cargo of a Swedish brig, including syringes, an anti-scorbutic decoction, elixir and opiates. There was a later shipment of senna leaves and cardamoms, castor oil and camphor. Mr J. H. Tredgold set up in business as a chemist at 63 Long Street in 1818 and advertised "English drugs". He kept Dalby's

carminative, anti-bilious pills, Seidlitz-soda and milk of roses. About two decades later the famous Dr C. G. Juritz opened the Angel Dispensary in Loop Street. Favourite medicines at the middle of last century were Barbadoes aloes, tartaric acid, ipecacuanha, valerian, parigoric lozenges and essence of ginger, not forgetting the powerful jalap. Mr F. P. Hutchinson not only supplied “fresh drugs” from his Waterkant Street pharmacy; he also extracted teeth.

Almost every chemist in Cape Town and elsewhere sold his own specific remedy for various complaints. Heynes Mathew opened the British Dispensary in the eighteen-thirties and closed down the retail business when the building in Adderley Street was demolished nearly one hundred and thirty years later. Petersen started

in the eighteen-forties and at one time the firm turned out eight hundred varieties of pills, essences for mineral water factories and curry powder. The plant world of Africa supplied many useful ingredients; one firm claimed that its medicines were seventy per cent African. Oudtshoorn farmers grew liquorice root for chemists. Mr Jesse Shaw was awarded medals and diplomas at great international exhibitions for his South African tinctures, alkaloids and powders. He had a “sure cure” for the bites of all venomous reptiles, a herbal tincture for neuralgia, eye lotion, embrocation and “the powder” for chronic dysentery. Mr Jones, a Long Street chemist declared that his “Rheumaticuro” was curing sufferers as far away as London and Lisbon.

One of the most successful Cape Town wholesale medical enterprises early this century was established by Mr W. E. Woods, an English chemist with thirty years' experience. He concocted "Woods Great Peppermint Cure" for coughs and colds. Mr Woods relied mainly on verses for his advertising and he employed writers in English, Dutch, German and Portuguese. Later he announced that a Kaffir poet had joined the staff. Directions on each bottle were printed in many languages, including Xhosa, Sesuto, Sechuana, Malay, Tamil, Hindi and Chinese. The cure was sold all over Southern Africa from the Cape to the Zambezi; tons of cough mixture went out by ship, train and ox-wagon. Mercifully I will quote only one example of the sort of

verse that made a fortune for Mr Woods:

*There's the sneezy cold,
the wheezy cold,
The tickler in the glottis;
The chilly cold, the killing cold,
The cold that burning hot is;
The tearful cold,
the fearful cold,
The one that all the lot is,
Yet these be colds that none
endure
Who purchase Woods' Great
Peppermint Cure.*

I liked the Victorian flavour of the old chemists' shops. Some of the chemists, like the impeccable Mr Cleghorn of Cleghorn and Darroll, wore morning coat, striped trousers and spats. They pounded their ingredients with pestle and mortar and rolled their own pills. No carrier-



"I liked the Victorian flavour of the old chemists' shops. . . They pounded their ingredients with mortar and pestle, and rolled their own pills"

bags in those days. The chemist used a bunsen burner and red sealing-wax for his neat white packages. The enormous British Pharmacopoeia was at his elbow, bound in leather. His materia medica came from hundreds of drawers and glass jars labelled "Turkey rhubarb" or "aqua chlorof". You needed a classical education to pull the right knob of green glass, the right bottle stopper, to make a blend that would send your client happily away.

Years ago I knew an itinerant dentist named Morton who had his base in Long Street. His room was equipped with a treadle apparatus for drilling teeth. Outside in the yard stood a motor caravan holding every detail of apparatus needed for pulling and filling teeth and making dentures, far out in the platteland. Morton was a

most resourceful old man, son of a dentist, steeped in dental tradition. He had received his training long before university courses were available, at a time when dentists engaged apprentices and taught them the craft. Of course there were also many quacks, chemists and others, who pulled teeth more or less successfully, more or less painfully.

Morton had endured this primitive treatment in his youth. He said the chemist gave him an armchair and told him to hold a basin under his chin. The chemist then seized the tooth with his forceps and hauled the tooth out. Morton rinsed his mouth with cold water, paid one shilling and departed thankfully. This experience gave him the idea of learning more scientific methods and so he became a dentist. Over the

years he had collected information on dentistry at the Cape and he showed me an album of curiosities. Back in 1817 the "Cape Town Gazette" printed an advertisement in which Mr C. F. T. Schwartz stated he had been given permission by the governor to practise cupping, blood-letting, corn-cutting and extracting teeth. About twenty years later Dr Carter was offering complete sets of teeth made of gold and platinum plates for thirty-five pounds. At this period a dentifrice called "Odonto" was placed on the market, "composed of the most rare ingredients, a never-failing remedy for every disease to which the teeth and gums are liable". A news cutting in the collection, dated about a century ago, stated that Dr Taylor of Grahamstown was bitten by a patient

whose tooth he was drawing. The doctor became seriously ill and died. Morton also had notes on dentists who accepted hens and turkeys in return for their services. There was a dentist who added to his income by building wagons. A paragraph in a Cape paper described the ordeal of a minister whose false teeth irked him so much that he had to take them out while preaching a sermon. Morton has pasted into his album a description of the porcelain teeth with which some people in Cape Town were fitted in the middle of last century. These teeth were known as Franse boontjies and they broke easily.

"Dentistry has only become a respectable occupation in recent years," Morton informed me. "You still see far too many jokes about dentists and false teeth. Yet dentistry

is a trade, an art and a science. I do my own laboratory work - I found long ago that I had the knack and I do not care to leave this delicate business to a mechanic. No two mouths are alike. I love to turn out a good set of choppers.” Morton had made I point of examining Bushman skulls during his travels and he had formed the opinion that primitive man needed sound teeth to masticate raw meat. Bushmen used herbs for toothache and filled cavities with horn shavings and powdered flint. Often they were able to extract a bad tooth by using their strong fingers and thumbs as forceps.

“Our ancestors in more civilised circles transplanted teeth centuries ago,” Morton informed me. “They would haul out a decayed tooth. Then the donor would give up a

sound tooth which was tapped into the patient’s jaw with a wooden mallet. There is evidence that the tooth and jawbone often knitted perfectly.” Years ago dentists and others collected teeth for dentures on battlefields and in graveyards. Some carved dental plates out of solid blocks of ivory. Poor girls sold their teeth to wealthy women. Morton said the introduction of nitrous oxide was a great advance. Local anaesthesia had come during his own career in dentistry. “I consider that proper dentures have transformed everyday life to a greater extent than motor-cars and aeroplanes,” Morton declared. “Life is a misery without . teeth.”

Window-shoppers stop dead when they come to the unpredictable miscellany in a pawnbroker’s shop.

Tape recorders and electric shavers are heaped on musical instruments and golf clubs. If you want a camera or a portable typewriter you will certainly find a selection among the unredeemed pledges. Do you collect old silver tablespoons or war medals? The pawnbroker has them. Before the eighteenth century ended the victorious General Craig was warning Cape Town pawnbrokers against purchasing or receiving arms and ammunition. Pawnbrokers have been in business in Cape Town for at least two centuries but they are not flourishing as they did between the world wars. Long Street has lost some of the famous "uncles" who displayed their gleaming insignia years ago; the three brass balls that formed the armorial bearings of the illustrious Lombard family. Nowadays the

retirement or death of a pawnbroker often means the closing of the shop.

Something of the Dickensian atmosphere survives in the old-fashioned pawnbroker's shop, though washing machines and car radios give the modern touch. "Uncle" prefers gold and diamonds to false teeth and machines. In the trade they still tell the story of a South African Indian woman's black silk dress that was put up for auction at a sale of unredeemed pledges. The dress was decorated with breast plates made of two hundred and fifty Victorian half sovereigns, and there were another sixteen hundred half sovereigns sewn on to the rest of the dress. The sale took place a few years after World War I and bidders paid seventeen shillings and sixpence for each half sovereign.

I asked a Long Street pawnbroker whether people told him why they needed money. "Nearly always," he replied. "As a rule they have to pay their rent. Many confess they have lost money at the races. It may be a court fine that has to be paid - or someone needs bail money. Hospital or funeral expenses also create genuine emergencies. But now and again people regard a pawnbroker's shop as they would a railway cloak-room. They are going away on holiday and have nowhere to store something bulky, so they pawn it. Often it works out cheaper that way." Motor-cars and pianos have been pawned and one man succeeded in getting a ticket for a stage-coach and four horses. "Uncle Berks" of Long Street refused, however, to accept a pregnant white rabbit and a bottle of

tomato sauce. He had a customer who needed a diver's suit but unfortunately there was not one in stock.

Yes, the closing of an old shop spells the end of a thousand stories. It was a sad day for me when my old friend Edwin Payne shut up his Long Street photographic studio and transferred his business to Bulawayo. I had travelled into the country often with Ted Payne on newspaper missions. He had shown me pictures of an older Cape Town, the sort of pictures that would have an historic value today. I often wonder what happened to his box camera and the hundreds of large glass plates. Perhaps the most valuable relics of all would have been the reels of cinema film that were screened at Wolfram's and other early Cape Town bioscopes.

Ted Payne was the first regular newsreel cameraman in South Africa. His weekly "Payne's Mirror" first appeared in 1912, a year before the first "African Mirror".

CHAPTER SEVEN
BOOKS ARE A WORLD

*Dreams, books, are each a world:
and books we know,
Are a substantial world, both pure
and good:
Round these, with tendrils strong
as flesh and blood,
Our pastime and our happiness
will grow.*

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

AFRICANA, say the experts, has shown the greatest capital appreciation in the South African investment field. I started collecting Africana as a young reporter and bought as much as my salary would allow, little knowing that some of those books would fetch ten times the amounts I paid. Some of my own books, published in London and New York between the wars, are now

sold at seven or eight times the original prices.

What is Africana? There are many definitions and the widest cover not only books about Southern Africa but pamphlets, manuscripts and pictures. Some items of Africana are priceless. In the South African Public Library there is a sermon, printed in Amsterdam and delivered by the Rev. Wilhelm van Gendt of Stellenbosch in February 1743. Only one copy of this work is known. The same library possesses a sermon preached in 1752 before Governor Tulbagh by Petrus van der Spuy, a minister of religion who was the first South African to become a doctor of medicine. This sermon, printed in Utrecht, has an historical value for Van der Spuy related the story of the Cape during the first century of Dutch rule. And this,

too, is unique. Copies have been supplied to other libraries with noteworthy Africana collections: the Mendelssohn library in Parliament, the British Museum and the Hague archives. I have consulted Africana items in the British Museum which are to be found nowhere else in the world. Lisbon has many treasures, some probably undiscovered. And in the Vatican library they showed me Africana books that would make collectors envious.

Books were so rare in early Cape Town that the few bibliophiles tried to bribe the owners with wine and meat and other Cape products. Volumes were borrowed and copied. Even the Bible was found in few homes. Sick comforters went round the seventeenth century town reading passages from printed sermons. Only towards

the end of the eighteenth century were Bibles imported in any numbers, bulky and expensive volumes. Wealthy readers sent to Holland for books. Joachim von Dessin, regarded as the first Africana collector, went round buying up books during a smallpox epidemic. He waited until the owner of a library died and then appeared on the doorstep so quickly that relatives were shocked; but they parted with the books. In this way he built up a library of four thousand five hundred volumes, an enormous collection in the middle of the eighteenth century. The diary of Adam Tas was among his possessions. (His estate also included a *pedra porca* or snake stone, believed by ignorant people to extract venom from victims of snakebite or poisonous insects.) Von

Dessin was one of the founders of the South African Public Library.

Reading became easier during the early nineteenth century though even then most people in Cape Town had to rely on auction sales for their literature. Strombom the auctioneer advertised the sale of thirteen trunks filled with English books in 1802 and a doctor named Tyler put so many books on the market that the sale lasted several days. The first regular bookseller in the town was W. E. Sheppard, whose shop was in the Heerengracht. He offered Campbell's "Travels in South Africa", Barrow's two volumes and other books now in the "blue chip" class. Wentzel of Market (now Greenmarket) Square was another pioneer bookseller. He imported encyclopaedias and sets of Shakespeare and

warned the public that if these gems were not snapped up immediately they would be sent on to India.

Howell, who organised Cape Town's first lending library, offered charts of the Cape and the "Complete Farmer". Joseph Suasso de Lima, the Dutch hunchback who enlivened the Cape Town literary scene for forty years, was a writer, bookseller, editor of almanacs and a weekly newspaper and compiler of the first Africana catalogue. This last work, entitled "Register of all books, pamphlets and documents relating to the Cape of Good Hope", appeared in 1856 after sixteen years' work.

First of all the books to be written and printed in South Africa was the "Missionary Letter" (1799) now in the South African Public Library. The missionary Dr Johannes Vander-

kemp published a little spelling book of about three thousand monosyllables in 1802; and in the same year the Rev. Meent Borchers of Stellenbosch brought out his poem "De Maan, een Leerdicht" of twenty-nine pages. Robert Semple, the Cape Town merchant, published his "Walks and Sketches at the Cape of Good Hope" a year later but this was printed in London. Samuel Daniell's book of engravings called "African Scenery" was also published in London at this period. This fine work rose in value from eighteen pounds between the world wars to one hundred pounds after World War II and a good copy of the folio would be worth considerably more now. Cape Town authors had to struggle hard to achieve publication early last century. A minister named Thom

gathered material for a book entitled "The Caves of South Africa" and appealed through the "Cape Town Gazette" for money to have the book printed. Apparently there was no response. Then came "On De Lima" with his interesting flood of publications. The versatile C. E. Boniface, ex-naval officer, linguist, musician and theatrical producer, also added to the Africana of the period when he published an account of the wreck of the French ship L'Etoile. It was not until large and enterprising firms entered the publishing business, however, that local Africana began to flourish. Van der Sandt and Saul Solomon were pioneers and J. C. Juta arrived from Holland in the middle of last century. Juta published Bowler's "Album of Cape Town", prized by all collectors.

Sir George Grey, governor of the Cape in the middle of last century, was a great Africana collector. He left fifteen hundred items to the South African Public Library. At the same period Dr W. H. I. Bleek was building up his collection of books on African native languages. John Noble and C. A. Fairbridge were famous early collectors. In recent years Major William Jardine, a wealthy business man, formed a splendid Africana library. Many of his rare pictures are to be seen in the South African Public Library; the view of Cape Town by Craig, Bowlers, native types by Samuel Daniell and some fine water colours. Jardine was able to acquire copies of those early travellers that every Africana enthusiast longs to see on his shelves. He owned the narratives

of the Portuguese explorers, De Barros and Camoens; Dutch and English travellers, Houtman and Hakluyt, Purchas and others; Sir Thomas Herbert (1626), Dapper (1686), Tachard (1688), Ten Rhyn (1707) and Valentyn (1726). Quarto volumes and de luxe editions with handsome bindings and colour plates were added to the collection. He owned autographs of Cape governors right back to Adrian van der Stel. He gathered a complete set of the official "Gazette" from 1800 onwards. Many runs of old newspapers were to be found in his library on the estate Applegarth at Sir Lowry's Pass. He had letters written by John Fairbairn the journalist and Pringle the poet. Early examples of printing from mission presses and old maps were among his treasures.

Jardine was born at the Cape in 1867. He made a point of meeting the great figures in Cape history of his period. A librarian said of him: "Major Jardine was himself a piece of Africana, a living link with the past and an historical character in his own right."

When the Jardine library was sold just before World War II an outstanding personality in the Africana field was called in. This was Mr. Ernest Peverell Kitch, a dealer whose shops in Long Street and later in Church Street were the scenes of many of my own exciting little triumphs when I discovered an Africana book or pamphlet filled with inspiring or useful material. "Books Unlimited", as Kitch called his shop, was a dark place with stepladders and dusty shelves; but

almost every important or obscure item of Africana passed through his hands and I never knew what to expect when I visited him. I could have spent a year in that shop without buying a book and Kitch would not have minded. He was, of course, the greatest Africana dealer of his period and one of the first to sense the boom that was coming in these old books. Kitch landed in Cape Town at the age of seven and went to work in Darter's bookshop in 1888, when he was thirteen. He compiled his first Africana catalogue while still in his teens. Prices in that pioneer list had risen five times when Kitch had his famous catalogue of August 1937 printed. This yellow-covered work of over one hundred pages is now a collector's piece. Five times, but the librarian of today

would be very pleased indeed to pay Kitch's 1937 prices. Kolbe was to be had for twenty-five pounds; a large calf-bound copy of his description of the Cape of Good Hope, published in 1727 in Amsterdam. Sam Sly's "African Journal", the rare second volume, was offered at twelve guineas. You could buy the travels of Sir John Barrow, two volumes in halfmorocco for ten guineas and Sparrman's voyage for eight guineas. Even in those days such books were recognised as gems. Such a magnificent work as "The Wild Sports of Southern Africa" by Harris appeared in the Kitch catalogue at twentyseven shillings and sixpence. Harris wrote another book called "Portraits of Game and Wild Animals in South Africa" that fetched about twenty pounds

between the wars and rose to five times that amount recently. Kitch handled "The Kaffirs Illustrated" (1849) by George Angus, asking about thirty-five pounds for a book that is now worth two hundred pounds or more. He sold Bowler's "Pictorial Album of Cape Town" (an item that seems inescapable in any Africana discussion) for twenty pounds. You can bid up to five times that price at an auction sale nowadays without any risk.

At "Books Unlimited" it was possible to find the rare book in which Nathaniel Isaacs described his life among the Zulus. Kitch charged twenty pounds; one-fifth of the present value. The celebrated "Cape Flowers by a Lady" cost about eight pounds; and like other rare botanical works it has multiplied in value by

ten or twelve. Sir Andrew Smith's "Zoology of South Africa", a fine work with colour plates published in the middle of last century, fetched only about twenty-five pounds in Kitch's day; now you can multiply that value by ten. Why are these huge increases recorded? Dealers are sending Africana works, the classics and ordinary items, out of South Africa to fill the gaps in great libraries all over the world. Few copies return to this country and so collectors are forced to pay more and more for the desirable items.

Mr R. F. M. Immelman, the University of Cape Town librarian, traced many unusual Africana rarities. Catalogues of early book auctions or lists of books in insolvent estates have revealed the literary tastes of long ago. He found the

manuscript of a Dutch sailor's song in the Kimberley Public Library. One such song, written before the end of the eighteenth century, gave an idea of the sea-weary mariner's longing for the blessings of the land. Here is a sample:

*Een frissche roemer Kaapsche
wyn
Zal hem, die geld heeft, smaaklik
zyn*

Mr Immelman has also drawn attention to a hand-written cookery book compiled in India by Rudyard Kipling's mother and containing six Cape recipes. Anglo-Indian invalids recuperating at the Cape collected these recipes and passed them on to friends in India. This book is now in the University Library.

Collectors of Afrikaans items of Africana are always deeply interested in early examples of written Afrikaans. Mr P. J. Nienaber, a leading authority on this subject, awards first place to a poem in honour of Swellendam heroes who fought in the bloedige actie at Muizenberg on August 7, 1795. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came an Afrikaans dialogue by M. D. Teenstra and various works by Suasso de Lima. "Kaatje Kekkelt-bek" by Rex and Bain follows; and the versatile Boniface, whose activities I have already mentioned, was first in the Afrikaans field in Natal with his contributions to "De Natalier". A number of Afrikaans articles were published in the "Cradock News" in 1860 and after that date written Afrikaans ceased to be a rarity. It has been suggested that

the first book printed in Afrikaans (then known as Cape Dutch or Kombuis Hollands) was a pamphlet intended for Malays, a religious handbook that was produced without the usual machinery. Christiaan Schonegevel, a Long Street artist, printer and teacher of music and drawing, has been credited with this effort. According to the historian F. R. Bradlow the book came out in 1856, five years before L. H. Meurant's well-known "Zamen-spraak tusschen Klaas Waarzegger en Jan Twijfelaar". It seems that the manuscript of another Afrikaans handbook for Cape Malays entitled "Bajaanoedien" was sent to Istanbul in 1874 and eight hundred copies were printed there. The characters were Arabic but the language was the authentic speech of the Cape

Malays at that period. Very few copies have survived. An English translation was published by the University of Leiden about ten years ago under the title: "The Religious Duties of Islam as taught by Abu Bakr Effendi".

Women have been among the outstanding collectors and authorities on Africana. In Natal there was Dr Killie Campbell; in the Cape the expert Miss Kathleen M. Jeffreys passed on to me a little of her enormous experience. Miss Jeffreys was born in Cape Town. Her childhood memories included South African War scenes, for she carried gifts from her mother to the troops in camp on Signal Hill. "I was a rebellious child, and years after I left the Huguenot Seminary at Wellington they were still talking of me as the

naughtiest child ever known at the school," Miss Jeffreys told me. "However, I became a school teacher myself after training at the old Normal College in Bloemfontein." Her salary was twelve pounds a month, and when she had saved one hundred pounds she decided to take a degree in history and modern languages at Rhodes. This led to her appointment at the Archives in 1917. Immediately she came under the spell of bygone personalities. She sat in the chair not long vacated by the first official archivist, the Rev. H. C. Leibbrandt, and assisted the gifted and methodical Colin Graham Botha in the task of extracting rich material from old documents. "I soon found that the real joy of history lay in the discovery of people as they were, not as impossibly pious characters but as

human beings with human failings,” went on Miss Jeffreys. One of the characters she came to admire most during her research work was Commissioner-General J. A. de Mist, a man whose brilliant mind was reflected both in his handwriting and his words. He was given seven weeks to prepare for his mission to the Cape. In this time, from sources available in Holland, he wrote a memorandum which showed a remarkable grasp of the situation. His ideas were far in advance of early nineteenth-century thought. Then there was Sir George Grey, a scholarly man who appealed to Miss Jeffreys because of his love of books. Grey was sickened by the game slaughter he saw when entertaining Prince Alfred in South Africa in 1860, and later in his life he bought an island in New Zealand

waters and set up a nature reserve. The tragedy of Grey’s life (glossed over by his biographers) was his marriage. His pretty wife appears to have been unfaithful during a voyage to the Cape and they were separated for many years. Miss Jeffreys discovered a scrap of unrecorded history, however, when she learnt that the Greys were reunited in old age.

I asked Miss Jeffreys to recall the most dramatic document she had ever found in the Archives. “In the days when censorship at the Cape was so strict that the only printing press was kept at the Castle a pamphlet was printed there secretly,” replied Miss Jeffreys. “It was written by Van Pallandt, secretary to Janssens, and dated 1802, so that it must have been the first pamphlet

printed at the Cape. The title was 'General Remarks on the Cape of Good Hope', and Van Pallandt criticized the Government. The copy I found was the only one still in existence. I have always wondered how he carried out the daring plan of using the press for this purpose under the very noses of the people he was attacking."

In the huge Africana collection which Miss Jeffreys formed were many albums of early Cape Town photographs. She left a great wealth of material to the Cape archives. Among her thousands of photographs are many views taken in the early eighteen-seventies by Mr E. J. Steer, a member of the first Cape Town Photographic Society. Earlier still is a picture of the English Church at Three Anchor Bay, which was a

brewery before it was turned into a church. That print is well over a century old.

Miss Jeffreys also had many family daguerrotypes and a large number of portraits of Beaufort West people, ancestors of present residents. Unfortunately no one ever thought of writing names on the backs of portraits and many remain unidentified. Her own home was at Camps Bay, and she had a set of photographs showing the construction of the vanished tramway lines. Another set illustrates the Kasteel's Poort cableway lifting material for the building of the Table Mountain reservoirs. Miss Jeffreys also collected Cape Town theatrical and concert programmes. The series starts with the concert given in honour of Prince Alfred at the

Commercial Exchange in 1860, and includes eleven operas performed in Cape Town in 1888.

On Saturday mornings I often found Miss Jeffreys in charge of a second-hand bookstall on the Parade, an occupation which allowed her to study human nature at first hand. She never lived entirely in the past. Years ago, when she was a customer herself, she found Africana bargains on the Parade. She bought the first Afrikaans almanac, published in Paarl in 1877, for a tickety. But in recent years the stall-holders have come to know exactly what they are selling. Miss Jeffreys was a widely travelled woman, though most of an overseas holiday between the wars was spent in the archives of the Hague and London. She was a linguist - English, Afrikaans, Nederlands, French and

German - and she acquired a smattering of Hindustani before visiting India.

Long ago she published three little books of poetry. Part I of the "Kaapse Plakkaatboek" was the work of Miss Jeffreys, and she translated the memorandum of her hero, De Mist, into English for publication by the Van Riebeeck Society. Her years in the Archives were peaceful but she remembered one alarming interlude. For a fortnight she assisted an odd-looking, eccentric man who declared that he had come to the Archives to find material for a "truthful history of South Africa". At last the searchers found him. He was an escaped lunatic.

"Book collecting is the least obnoxious and the most beneficial form of the collecting instinct," Miss

Jeffreys declared. "Books reveal the collector. For that reason the libraries of famous people should never be broken up." When she retired from the Archives after twenty-nine years of service Miss Jeffreys made catalogues of libraries, attended sales of books and valued Africana items. She left the most valuable part of her collection, about fifteen thousand books on Africa south of the Zambezi, to the Cape Archives. A sale of other items, held in Cape Town during February 1969, was attended by dealers and collectors from all over the country. Six hundred lots were listed. Her rare Cape silver included a marrow scoop and a pair of shoe buckles. One of her albums of what she called "neglected little ephemera" fetched fifty Rands. "There was nothing she did not

collect," remarked an expert at the sale. Miss Jeffreys preserved many facets of humanity from the middens of our social past.

Mr C. Struik, that shrewd Cape Town dealer in Africana, laid down certain rules for those who wish to become intelligent collectors. Condition is everything. That rule applies to stamps and coins and the condition of a book is of first importance. Foxing may reduce the value by half. At sales, when the vultures gather, the collector must make sure the items he has chosen are complete; and if there is a page or a map missing from one book there may be other incomplete works in the same library. The true bibliophile is always replacing imperfect books with clean copies. Prices of great Africana and standard Africana are

always rising and many books will yield ten per cent a year. However, the true Africana collector finds the fiercest joy in collecting rather than selling.

CHAPTER EIGHT
WISE APPETITE

*That which is not good is not
delicious
To a well-governed and wise
appetite.*

MILTON

MY own Africana collection has a strong food and wine section and these books I shall never sell. I can trace the meals of strandlopers and explorers at the Cape long before Van Riebeeck landed; and my recipe books and menus run through the cooking methods of the centuries from campfires to modern infra-red stoves.

Jessie Conrad, wife of the great sea novelist, declared that the object of a cookery book could only be to

increase the happiness of mankind. She regarded conscientious cooking as the enemy of gluttony, with the trained delicacy of the palate, like a cultivated delicacy of sentiment, standing in the way of unseemly excesses. My books on gastronomy take their place next to the pleasures of the table. They have flavour and aroma. Gone are the days when I could find with ease the old Cape dishes as they cooked them during my childhood at Madeira House, the old Madeira House at the top of Plein Street. No longer does the White House Hotel in Strand Street put on a sosatie meal with as many exotic accompaniments as a Javanese rystafel. But I have the menus and the recipes. I can almost savour the richness of the banquets of long ago.

This journey through the records of enjoyment begins in the sailing ships of the explorers and those who followed. Epicures of those days spoke of knocking the maggots out of their hard ship's biscuits when they sat down to a meal. They lived on salted or smoked beef, mutton and goat served up in soups and stews with barley, peas or beans added. Butter was a luxury. Oil or vinegar were included in the rations. Salt herrings appeared twice a week. Beer and Spanish wine were doled out carefully to the crew; never as much as those tough seamen wanted. Mustard and honey were regarded as medicines. Spices such as pepper and ginger were reserved for the sick. Cheese was available in the early part of the voyage from Holland but it soon went bad. Distinguished

passengers fared better, of course, for they had pickled rolpens (mince in tripe), dried bread, dried herbs, salt cabbage. Green beans were preserved in barrels with salt, pepper and vinegar. By the time a ship reached the Cape the scurvy-stricken crew were avid for the fresh foods and medicinal plants of Table Valley. They saw the veldkos collected by the Hottentots and gathered the wild plants for themselves. These were the longed-for blessings of the land.

Here it may be noted that the floral kingdom of the Cape provided early visitors with valuable medicines rather than satisfying foodstuffs. Explorers who landed in the West Indies and the Americas found potatoes and maize, tomatoes, tropical fruits and other wonders. At

the Cape the sick and hungry seamen had to content themselves with uintjies, the bulbs that taste like chestnuts when cooked; or the water-uintjies that resemble the pistachio and spinach flavour in a stew. (French ships carried this plant back to Brest and cultivated it for the flowers, but the chefs soon discovered other qualities.) The sweetish suikerwortel or anyswortel, rather like the parsnip of civilisation, was another Cape root that helped to cure scurvy; and this, too, was sent to Paris and grown there as a food plant. During the months of May and June they picked the flower buds of the wild cabbage, the veldskool, that makes a fine bredie and a still more wonderful creamed puree. Wild asparagus was eaten with relish for the young shoots are a delicacy.

They also gathered an edible polmiet in the vleis. Augustin de Beaulieu (1620), the French navigator, gave details of the Hottentot diet: "They eat certain roots which are their chief food, about the size of small chestnuts and white, with a stalk like that of a leek but narrower and not dentated and bearing a white flower; they are pretty tasty." Thirty years later another Frenchman, the widely-travelled Tavernier, wrote of a root eaten by the natives. "It much resembles our sugar-root. This they roast and it serves them for bread. Sometimes also they make a flour from it, which tastes like oatmeal."

Those old seamen, roaming the veld close to Table Valley, saw the yellow sorrel flower and ate the roots. The fresh, acid flavour was extremely welcome after the long

salt diet of mid ocean. They ate scarlet berries cautiously, the berries known later as *bokdorings*. Among the dunes they picked the green pods of *melkelsies*, a sort of wild lettuce found among thorn bushes. It was not a feast but it cured their spongy gums and their teeth became firm again.

Peter Floris, a Dutch seaman who called at the Cape in the English ship *Globe* early in the seventeenth century, referred in his writings to his search for a root called *ningin*. Floris said that a Japanese sailor had discovered this root near the shores of Table Bay and had reported that it was identical with the Korean *ginseng*, which was worth its weight in silver. "I used great diligence in seeking out the root, according to our instruction, two Holland ships being

expressly come here for the same purpose," Floris wrote. "But being winter time there was for this time nothing more to be done but to go away as wise as we came, for the old root being decayed and rotten the new leaf began only to come forth ... the right time of gathering the same being in December, January and February, being called of these inhabitants *Canna*." This none-too-clear description presented botanists with a mystery that has never been solved. Dr D. J. Burtt Davy and the Kew experts thought it might have been *Lichtensteinia interrupta*, a medicinal plant widely distributed in South Africa; however, this has never been recorded near Table Bay. It is interesting to note from the Floris narrative that Japanese sailors visited the Cape in the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries. But what did they really find?

Van Riebeeck tried to cultivate the *veldkos* of the Hottentots but failed. His gardeners had better luck with the “wild plants of Africa”, the medicinal plants. About half a century later a Dutch ship’s surgeon named Cornelius Valk was granted the farm that became known as Valkenburg so that he could grow the plants that would cure scurvy and other complaints. He treated soldiers and sailors who were suffering from vitamin deficiency and mental afflictions. Part of the house he built is still there and there is still a mental hospital on the site.

Van Riebeeck’s diaries are full of descriptions of food, with a note of yearning often apparent. Officers at the Castle seldom went hungry

though a cuisine in which a leg of penguin was looked upon as a delicacy cannot have been luxurious. The commander was always loud in his praise of the Cape food; but I wonder whether the dassies from Dassen Island were really “more delicious than any other meat we had ever tasted”. They could have filled their bellies with every sort of wild animal from hippo to wild duck and sometimes they did so. Unfortunately the Dutch hunters were armed with such primitive weapons that the meat problem remained unsolved for many years. When the fat-tailed sheep were brought from Robben Island to the Castle it was a time for rejoicing. More often they sat down to the interminable harders, steenbras and snoek. Penguins were knocked down by the hundred and sent to Table Bay

salted in barrels. Van Riebeeck's men were such great meat-eaters that they even tackled baboon flesh, but without enthusiasm.

By the end of the seventeenth century the Cape settlement had become noted for the quality and variety of the food. The Abbé de Choisy, passing through on his way to Siam, declared: "I doubt if anywhere in the world there is a better country to live in than the Cape of Good Hope. Everywhere there is excellent beef, mutton and poultry. The game is delicious. Of three kinds of partridge, white, red and grey, there are some as big as fattened chickens. They have not the flavour of Avergne partridges, but their meat is short, white and tender and they are tasty at least as hazel-hens." Mentzel, writing a few

decades later, counted fifty dishes at a dinner. He said it was as elaborate as Amsterdam. The meal started with a tureen of strong cucumber flavoured soup, fish pickled in oil and beef with sauce. The main roasts were turkey and venison with rice, followed by hot pasties of pigeon and rabbit. It ended with sweetmeats and fruit. Certainly a cuisine that Van Riebeeck never knew while he was commander.

No doubt there were cookery books on board Van Riebeeck's ships though I have never discovered a mention of them. Cooks at the Castle must have used some of the Dutch recipe books that were printed in the low countries during the century and a half before Van Riebeeck landed. You will find in the Leipoldt collection, South African Library, a

reprint of “Het Eerste Nederlandsche Gedrukte Kookboek,” printed in 1510. Woodcuts show appropriate kitchen scenes. Dr C. Louis Leipoldt was an authority on cookery books old and new and I often discussed this subject with him. He told me of a Dutch cookery book that was translated and published in England during the seventeenth century – “Receipts for Dutch Victuals”. This was the period when flowers and herbs unknown today were included in recipes. The advice given in these early books was not limited to cookery and medicines. Morals were included and women were informed that they must be “upright and sincerely religious”. Leipoldt was naturally interested in the close link between medicine and cookery. Seventeenth and eighteenth century

cookery books were written in England by medical practitioners. Dr Lister, physician to Queen Anne, remarked: “No man can be a good physician who has not a competent knowledge of cookery.” But the phrase that amused Leipoldt was uttered by Dr Samuel Johnson the author: “For my part I mind my belly very studiously and very carefully, for I look upon it, that he who does not mind his belly will hardly mind anything else.” Leipoldt called one of his own books on food “The Belly Book”.

Leipoldt delighted in handwritten recipe books compiled at the Cape and handed down from mother to daughter, generation after generation. He showed me the work of the Widow van Blommestein written towards the end of the eighteenth

century. It opened with *amandelkoekies* and sago pudding; there were recipes for stuffed snoek, whole orange *konfyt* and a remedy for “*Zweerende*” chest. He had in his collection the Manuel family recipes starting in 1836 and the Schwage collection of the same period. Leipoldt compared these manuscripts with those printed in the pioneer European cookery book written by J. B. Platina, the Vatican librarian and gastronome towards the end of the fifteenth century. “I found no great difference in essentials though the details vary considerably,” Leipoldt summed up. “This study led me to the conclusion that South African cookery, and the cookery of nearly all civilised lands, is based on the careful blending of flavours that had

its origin in Italy in the Middle Ages.”

It was in an old Italian cookery book that Leipoldt came across a recipe for *bobotie* under that very name. South Africans think of this curried mince (with almonds on top) as the very essence of the old Cape cuisine. In fact it was a favourite of Richard Coeur-de-Lion back in the twelfth century and according to “Traditional Fare of England and Wales” it was still a popular dish in the middle of the eighteenth century. I would not expect to find it on the menu at Simpson’s-in-the-Strand nowadays.

I copied a very old recipe based on one of Leipoldt’s manuscript books, one that he greatly relished every grape season. He called it “hanepoot hen”. “Take a fat hen; prepare it for the pot, and wipe it dry inside and

out. Rub the outside with half a lemon and the inside with a stick of green ginger. Put it in an iron pot with a tablespoon of fresh lard and a cupful of red wine, and let it braise slowly, taking care that it does not brown. It must remain a rich golden colour throughout the proceedings until it is brought to the table. When it is tender, take it out, salt and pepper it (some folk add a green chilli) and let it stand in the pot while you prepare the filling. For this you take a bunch of ripe hanepoot grapes and plunge it into boiling water so that you can peel the berries easily. Take out their pips, which you may throw away as they serve no further purpose in these proceedings. The berries you will divide into two parts; one part you will put into the vacancies of the

fowl, adding a snippet of lemon peel here and there; the other part you will put in the pot on which you now put the lid, after having first poured over the bird a small wineglassful of brandy. Let the pot simmer for a while, usually not longer than fifteen minutes. Take out the fowl and put it on its dish; arrange the berries neatly round it; make a gravy of what remains in the pot by binding it with a little flour and the yolk of an egg beaten up. Serve with rice and a salad. For extra refinement some cooks mince the hen's liver with a little shallot and a pinch of mace and mix this with the berries when they are put in the bird. But the dish is quite well enough without it."

The printed Dutch recipe book that was used by generations of Cape Town housewives was the celebrated

“Aaltje, of de Zuinige Keukenmeid”. This work appears to have started as “De Volmaakte Hollandsche Keukenmeid” in the middle of the eighteenth century. Many editions were published but the basic recipes remained unchanged. When you read these old books it is easy to imagine a Dutch family sitting round a polished table eating the sort of lavish and colourful meals to be found in so many paintings by Dutch masters. You see a nation of soup and potato lovers, with hare and rabbit as favourite dishes. The thin pancakes called *flensjes* are described, to be eaten with molasses, brown sugar or ginger. It is strange to see *snoek balletjes* in the index; a dish made with the Dutch pike.

For years Leipoldt tried to locate the first South African printed cookery

book. He told me that a copy of the first American cookery book, a tattered copy, fetched five hundred pounds at auction; and he would have paid a high price for the Cape counterpart. The disappearance of every copy of the first Cape cookery book is a deep mystery. Apparently the author's name was Cleghorn and his collection of Cape recipes was mentioned in a Cape Town newspaper in the eighteen-sixties. Leipoldt searched libraries and second-hand bookshops in vain for the elusive Cleghorn. However, he managed to secure a copy of the earliest known printed book in this class, a small octavo pamphlet by a Pietermaritzburg firm and dated 1879. I have studied this untitled and anonymous work in the South African Library. It opens with soup

recipes supplied by M. E. L., Mrs Masters, Mrs Walters and others; Scotch mutton broth, tomato soup, kidney soup and French milk soup. Then you come to fish cakes, kedgeree, oyster kromesbies and fillets of salmon. Conventional egg and meat dishes are included and it is only when you come to the sweets that you find a typically South African recipe. There among the canary, date and other puddings is a *boermeel* pudding contributed by Mrs. Shepherd. Among the biscuits are *boerbeskuit* and *mieliemeel* recipes. Guava jelly, ginger and melon jam and pawpaw jam were made in those days. You also find banana chutney, preserved water-melon and *nartjie* preserve.

Next on the pioneer list is “Cape Cookery” by Miss Alice Hewitt, a

little work for which Leipoldt had a high regard. Miss Hewitt was the daughter of a Cape Town merchant who lived in the Schoenmaker’s Gat homestead overlooking Clifton. Eleven children were born there, Alice in 1832. Alice never married but remained at home helping her mother and collecting the recipes which were first published in 1889 by Darter. Mrs M. Hanley, a relative, has recalled that “Aunt Allie” later ran a school for girls in Roeland Street and a fancy shop in Wale Street. Alice Hewitt retired to Sea Point and died there at the age of eighty-eight at her home in London Road.

“Cape Cookery” (sub-titled “Simple yet Distinctive”) opened with a description of the Cape fish. She had some good fish stews and a number

of authentic Cape crawfish recipes. Alice knew how to make the *klipkous* tender; she could pickle a snoek and turn out fish rissoles. Her meat and poultry section started with pot roasting and went on to the traditional *hoenderpastei*, *soutribbetjie* and *bobotie*. I wish that I could have cut into her quail pie. All the bredies are to be found in her pages. There is a potato stew with sago and fat mutton. She could buy a *pou* at the market in those days and she roasted it like turkey; this would now be an illegal feast. Her sheep's head soup must have been a terrific plate. She described a "real Cape curry" that included diced mutton, dried apricots, dried coconut, bay leaves, milk, onion and "Captain White's curry paste". (I had never heard of Captain White before.)

Alice Hewitt's sausages, home-made and smoked in the chimney, sound better than some of today's bangers. She winds up with predikant's tart, boer's birthday cake, *boerkoekies*, *mosbolletjies*, Bredasdorp pudding, yellow rice, konfyts and jellies and chutneys. This is a true Cape recipe book by the daughter of a Londoner and a Scottish girl from Edinburgh. One edition after another appeared during the next two decades. Years ago I had to pay one pound for the 1911 edition and I am sure it is worth several times that amount now.

Mrs A. R. Barnes, a contemporary of Miss Hewitt, came out in 1889 with her "Colonial Household Guide". She knew how to cook buck and guinea fowl. Her medical hints may have helped "isolated mothers". She recommended a bucket of water and

a quart of oatmeal for a tired horse and also told readers how to put out a fire in the chimney. As a cook, however, it must be admitted that Mrs Barnes was not in the same class as "Aunt Allie".

I need only mention the famous "Hilda's Where is It?" briefly. The firm of Chapman and Hall, London, first published this little book by Hildagonda Duckitt in 1891 and many thousands of copies were sold. Of course there was a large demand in South Africa but Hilda was a best-seller in England, too. I like to think of Victorian housewives in Manchester poring over the *mebos* recipe and a Cockney 'bus-driver coming home to find Mrs J. Cloete's *ouderwetse* chicken pie on the table.

A valuable bibliography on South African cookery by E. J. Paap,

published by the University of Cape Town, lists nearly three hundred books and pamphlets. In the British Museum Library, London, I found items that had escaped this careful bibliographer. This library has the largest collection of South African cookery books (especially the early ones) in the world. Possibly it came about as a result of an old copyright agreement. If you want recipes published by the Diocesan School for Girls in Grahamstown before World War I or curry and rice according to the Natal Technical College method, or the sour fig preserve recommended by the Methodist Women's Auxiliary (Cape district) you will find them among the five million volumes in the great circular reading-room of the British Museum. Here, too, you may read a cookery book written in 1912

by Mrs P. W. de Klerk telling you how to grease a saddle and get rid of baboons. Her atjar, *bobotie* and kaffir melon jam recipes are more appetising.

Some so-called South African recipe books contain very few Cape recipes. For example, an old book written by “a Cape Lady F. R.” has only *soetkoekies* and *nartjie* preserve to justify the title. Neither the lady nor the printer could spell. A more interesting effort called “*Tafel-Vreugde*” by Mrs D. F. Malherbe appeared in Bloemfontein soon after World War I. The first edition is now a valuable Africana item. Mrs Malherbe had nine strong soups, including one made with fish heads. Her *snoekmootjiesambaal* and salt snoek salad must have pleased those who tasted them. The book was

reprinted in 1926 as “*Eet met Lus*” and is now to be found on many shelves.

An early Natal cookery book has recipes for egg-plant cutlets, curried egg-plant and rice, pilau of chicken and msobo jam made with wild blackberries found in the mealie fields. According to a cookery booklet published by the South African Sugar Association, mealie bread is a Natal contribution to the South African cuisine. Leipoldt declared that this was a true Afrikaans item, not to be found in overseas cookery books. Mealie bread was made in South America, home of the mealie, but the method was different. Leipoldt favoured a recipe in which boiled green mealies were cut off, ground, mixed with milk, cream, a little sugar, salt and nutmeg; then

placed in a mould and steamed. It was cut and served as a vegetable with meat; or it could be eaten as a pudding with a sweet sauce. According to the Sugar Association, traditional South African soups are hard to find; but bean soup and artichoke soup are suggested as typical soups of the country.

Among the recipes from Holland that have survived almost unchanged in South Africa are those for the ginger-beer made by the cask in the platteland as a Christmas and New Year drink. The Department of Agriculture, which does so much to encourage good cooking, has published this recipe. Other old Dutch delicacies are the rolled wafers called *oblietjies* and the flat buns known as *tempies*. I believe Van Riebeeck's

pickled meat recipe *tasaalvleis* is still followed in the country.

My collection includes many pamphlets sent out free (or almost free) by various commercial firms, boards and semi government bodies to explain how certain foods should be used. I have booklets on lemons and dairy products, eggs and raisins, beef and pork, fish and pastry. Some of the finest recipe books are those compiled by women's associations as fundraising efforts. The recipes are usually successful, tested recipes based on the personal experiences of members. Typical of these useful pamphlets is one called "Household Hints" by Mrs M. E. Heighway and Mrs C. J. H. Schoombie of the South African Railway Women's Association (Kimberley branch). This effort first appeared before World War II.

Each woman who contributed a recipe gave sixpence to the fund and one thousand copies were sold. One edition after another appeared with additional recipes and a copy is to be found among Queen Elizabeth's cookery books. I do not know whether the *soet-suurdeeg* recipe for brown bread has been used at Buckingham Palace yet. Many other Cape favourites are there, from snoek kedgerie to stuffed venison, if the royal chefs need them.

I am especially interested in little school and other cookery pamphlets containing regional dishes. One school on the banks of the Orange River tells you how to use the dates grown there in cakes and tarts. I have a cutting from Oudtshoorn describing ostrich delicacies; ostrich gizzard with sour cream sauce; stuffed ostrich

leg; savoury ostrich egg and so on. A school magazine published years ago in the North West Cape contains practical advice on the *veldkos* of the Nieuwoudtville district, the *baroe* and *voëlvoet* dug out by trekboers, shepherds and schoolboys. You learn that *rapdol* is nice but hard to find. The most plentiful varieties are *kruluintjies*, *soetuintjies* and *kraaiuintjies* found in sandy soil. You can tell the *bobbejaanuintjie* by its lovely flowers. The *tghab* grows among the *vyebos* and the stalk is edible. Look for *vinkels* after rain but do not eat too many at once. Yes, the schoolboys of Nieuwoudtville led me into a new world of flavour.

Another pamphlet describes sweet potato pudding, karoo cheese pie (with tender Jerusalem artichokes lining the dish), karoo biscuits and

springbok cake. A forgotten Natal effort gives me pawpaw cocktail, baked bananas and avocado sherbet. Pamphlets edited by women are always loaded with puddings and cakes; thus the women of an agricultural association in the Cape have a different pudding for every day of the year. It opens with almond cream and runs the gamut to *wortel-poeding*, every recipe bearing the name of the contributor.

When you have steeped yourself in the inspirational aromas that drift out of all these cookery books, old and new, the essence of Cape cookery rises before you. It is, of course, a blend of west and east with the southeasters of the south playing their vital part and keeping the kitchen fires burning. You may visualise the original Dutch cooking carried out in

the mud fort of Van Riebeeck; strange fishes, queer meats roasted on spits. Then came the Malays with their oriental skill, curing meat with spices that made it taste so much better than salt. Malays brought bredies, too, and even more exotic dishes. Malay slaves learnt much from their Dutch masters and yet their own influence went so far into the cuisine that it became an essential part of a new technique. Huguenots brought the French touch, a light touch. They used a great deal of lard and taught the older colonists the art of placing hot cinders on the lids of cooking pots; or as they said in French *la cuisson sous la cendre*. Leipoldt suggested that the first biltong was made in the French Hoek valley by farmers who used a Basque recipe. Flemish and Italian dishes are now to

be found under Afrikaans names. Germans came along with their skill as sausage-makers. I have a Cape Town guide published early this century with pictures of the "Brunswick sausage fair" in Shortmarket Street; a huge showroom hung with polonies, sausages, hams, game and biltong. Business men bought sandwiches there for lunch. The influence of English cooks is also clear enough in South Africa though the great English dishes are seldom seen at their best here. Leipoldt and many others have pointed out that meat has always been the weak item in South African cookery. English cooking depends on some of the finest meat in the world; prime Scotch beef, Southdown and Hampshire mutton, Welsh mountain lamb, all flavoured by magnificent pastures. "One could

only get a really succulent steak in South Africa on a farm where the host killed his own ox and prepared it with loving care," Leipoldt declared.

Of course I have a great many menus in my cookery collection and here is one Cape farm dinner that contains a grand assortment of the traditional dishes. It opens with bean soup, the Cape soup that has been compared with the rich French *sobronade* of Perigord. Then perlemoen with rice; sucking pig with baked apples and prunes; chicken pie with yellow rice and raisins; springbok with quince jelly; *waterblommetjie bredie*; Cape gooseberry tart; wine jelly with cream; coffee. A farm is the right background for the old Cape dishes and one of the few places where you may be fairly sure of finding them

nowadays. We have the books but how seldom we use them. On the farms and in the villages the great open fireplaces survive. There the dried fruit is prepared in the old-fashioned way; without sulphur but dried under the sun and stewed with lemon peel and cinnamon, a trace of nartjie peel and a glass of sweet wine.

There was a time when cookery books were simply recipe books with home hints and more or less useful medical advice in an appendix. Some of these old Cape compilers were unconscious humorists but in other ways they were practical rather than enjoyable in the literary sense. South Africa's first food writer to give her work a picturesque background was Hildagonda Duckitt in her classic "Diary of a Cape Housekeeper". Here are the people of the Darling district,

here is the Victorian scene. You see the horses grinding the corn, the East African cook (rescued from a slave dhow) in the enormous kitchen. The wine grapes come in and Hilda refers you to her recipes for grape jam and *mosbolletjies* made with the fermented juice of the steen or hanepoot. This is the sort of vivid food writing which was rare in Britain and America until after World War II; the writing that is a blend of romance and happy memories combined with practical experience. The other Cape writer who revealed great skill in this direction, of course, was Dr Louis Leipoldt. In his "*Kos vir die Kenner*", "Diner's Guide" and other works he appears not only as a skilled cook and dietician but also as a man who had mastered the art of dining.

Here I must mention two more South African women who made great names for themselves in the old-fashioned cookery book tradition. One was Jeanette van Duyn (Mrs Slade), a Porterville girl who went to the Transvaal. There she met General Louis Botha, who recognised her talent and sent her overseas to study cookery. Later she worked under famous chefs in London. On her return she lectured all over South Africa, filling halls everywhere. She taught railway chefs to prepare the old Cape dishes and during World War II she lectured to army cooks. Her first book appeared in 1914 and her works are still in demand.

Thousands of South African housewives possess "The Practical Cookery Book for South Africa" by S. van H. Tulleken. This Transvaal author's

recipes are always easy to follow. Her exhibits at agricultural shows won many prizes. All the typical South African delicacies appear in her pages from sweet potato tart to watermelon cake. If you want creamed snoek or a General Louis Botha cake, here it is, with prickly pear soup thrown in for good measure.

A more recent writer with the literary touch was Hilda Gerber of Cape Town. She was in Germany soon after World War I, when she learnt to overcome shortages during the period of severe rationing. Dr Hans Herxheimer, her husband, said that she left Germany to escape the Nazi regime. Her recipes are both simple and imaginative and she invented many new dishes. Hilda Gerber's "Traditional Cookery of the Cape Malays" is far more than a recipe

book. It gives you the life of the Malay Quarter.

Most cookery books published in South Africa between the wars set out to tell the housewife how to prepare almost every well-known everyday dish. Now the specialists are claiming our attention; fish specialists, meat specialists, curry and rice wizards, *braaivleis* experts and so on. I remember Leipoldt saying that *sosaties* and *karmenaadjies* must be placed on a gridiron on the open veld with the aromatic smoke of *renosterbos* perfuming the meat. Leipoldt had a *braaivleis* recipe copied by his grandmother from a seventeenth century American cookery book. It was a Red Indian recipe. They rolled the meat in leaves and grilled it in a hole in the ground. This type of cookery is as old as mankind, the

cookery that revives appetites jaded after too much elaborate city fare.

Do not ignore the literature of the kitchen for it tells the story of the country and it is full of unexpected episodes. When the Duke of Wellington was living in the Cape Peninsula he rode every evening from his lodgings in Maitland to a house in Newlands where a Malay cook prepared marvellous dishes. She had been summoned to Government House by Lord Charles Somerset to teach the French chef the technique of Cape cookery as applied to fish, curry and other specialities. Every night Major Arthur Wellesley sat down to one of the finest meals the Cape could provide. Unfortunately the great soldier was completely indifferent to everything placed before him, food

and wine. I hope you do not share that
dreadful affliction.

CHAPTER NINE

CAVALCADE OF CARDS

HAVE you noticed how some of the most prized possessions of childhood vanish in such a way that you cannot ever remember parting with them? I still have my stamp album and some of my postcards but my cigarette cards have gone for ever.

One of my favourite Cape Town shops before World War I was in Plein Street, a little place devoted to stamps, cigarette cards and postcards. Naturally it attracted a good many schoolboys but there were older customers as well. I never knew the name of the proprietress. She called it the “Hobby Shop” and I recall her as a kindly, rather blousy woman who nipped out occasionally for a drop at the Westminster, leaving a notice on

the door: “Back in five minutes.” I was prepared to wait, for the small shop window was filled with wonderful paper treasures beyond my means. She never returned in five minutes; but she was no fool when it came to buying and selling her wares.

Those were the days of “satin inserts” as we called them, cigarette cards printed on silk. They were packed with local cigarettes but they were made in Europe and the colour printing was superb. Subjects included roses, birds, butterflies, railway engines, sea shells, rare postage stamps, famous and beautiful women, flags of all nations and dogs. As I did not smoke I had a choice of buying the cards or looking for them on the pavements of Cape Town. I never picked up a “satin insert” but the patience cards issued by another firm

were common enough. Few collectors ever completed a pack as certain cards were extreme rarities; the idea was to keep the customers smoking recklessly in the hope of finding the missing ace of diamonds. Another popular series depicted the South African rugby football team of 1912-13 in black and white. Members of the Legislative Assembly came later but these were never in such demand as the animals and silent cinema stars also found in "Officer's Mess" packets. Quite right too.

It was the South African War (you may be surprised to hear) that put cigarette cards into shop-windows and albums. Tobacco firms had started packing cards some years earlier, first plain cards as stiffeners and then picture cards. The earliest cigarette card still eludes the

collector and if ever it can be positively identified it will probably fetch more than certain Cape triangular stamps. Some say the Germans were first in this wide field; others claim that the idea originated in the United States in the eighteen-eighties. Britain followed with ships and soldiers, wild animals and South African natives. Even the oldest cards reveal artistic skill, attention to detail and careful research to ensure accuracy. Of course there were protests when certain firms gave out "pin-up girls" and it was said that licensed sex was being placed on a pedestal. The girls remained, though they had to compete with coins of all nations, birds of the tropics, song birds of the world and household hints. A series of kings and queens of England on satin appealed so

strongly to the aged Queen Victoria that she bought an album and started a collection.

Newspapers did not publish photographs in those days. Sketches of important events appeared but these were in black and white. Thus the outbreak of the South African War enabled tobacco firms to fill a gap. They brought out series after series of military subjects so that a good collection would form a pictorial history of the war. Mistakes were made by printers and these cards, like postage stamp errors, are rare and valuable. For example, one Transvaal series gave a portrait of Major General Pole-Carew on one side and a description of a naval gun instead of the general's career on the back. Another card gave an account of Winston Churchill's famous

escape but printed a profile of Napoleon III on the other side. As a rule the cards were accurate. Taddy of London issued a set of Victoria Cross heroes and also a unique set of Boer leaders.³ Another firm devoted a card to General Christiaan de Wet and promised their smokers a card in due course showing the capture of the elusive general. This undertaking was conveniently forgotten when De Wet

³ R. F. K., writing in "Africana Notes and News" in 1951, valued the series of 125 Boer War V.C.s at £100 and described it as "among the highest-priced cartophilic gems". A. J. Woolley, a later contributor to the same journal, stated that the first South African cigarette cards were issued between 1884 and 1890. The Ace Cigarette Co. opened its Three Castles factory in Johannesburg in 1894 in a building designed like a castle with turrets. Acme issued a "Soldiers of the World" series and also organised a "free sweep" with money prizes.

stayed in the field until the very end. Kipling's war poems, such as "The Absentminded Beggar", were printed on cigarette cards. Events in the theatre of war were reduced to this miniature panorama; you can see Lord Roberts visiting the wounded, the guns at Paardeberg, officers at lunch on a Modder River farm after the Battle. W. D. and H. O. Wills not only placed cards in their packets but also small discs fitted with hooks with portraits of General Buller, Lord Kitchener and others; and these discs were worn on watch-chains. One rare South African war set of fifty cards published by Smith of Glasgow was fetching twenty pounds a set between the world wars and is worth more now. Miss M. K. Jeffreys, that great Africana collector, purchased a number of South African War cards

for her collection during a visit to England many years ago. She found great difficulty in building up her series on this subject, however, as collectors like to have these early cards in their albums.

Cape Town firms came on the cigarette card scene well before World War I, as I have said. Among the pioneer efforts was a set of jiu jitsu cards with a local exponent known as Osaka showing the holds. (I remember Osaka well for he gave a demonstration at my school). Rugby and cricket teams were popular subjects. Little pieces of lace were packed with one brand and these were crocheted together to form tablecloths and bedspreads. Scenes from one of the first South African big-game hunting films were used as cigarette cards. South African places of

interest, famous buildings, flowers and racehorses all went on to cards. Arms and crests of schools and universities, boy scout, guide and voortrekker badges and coat-of-arms formed other series. The old Springbok series dealing with South African heraldry proved to be so accurate that the Johannesburg Public Library mounted and used the cards as an official work of reference. I understand that a “flags of all nations” series packed in South Africa shortly before World War I ranked as the longest series issued anywhere in the world at that time. Another interesting enterprise was a map of the world printed in sections of cigarette card size by a Johannesburg firm. Prizes of one hundred pounds were offered to those who put

the whole map together. It took a long time.

Study a catalogue of cigarette card issues and you will see that the owner of a large collection is in possession of an illustrated encyclopaedia. A simple device adopted nearly a century ago to prevent cigarettes from being crushed has become a valuable educational medium. The information is given in condensed form; there is no “padding”. Yet these cards are so authentic that they have been placed as evidence before courts of law. A famous trial involving the pattern of a stolen Scottish tartan was settled by a cigarette card. Many a research worker, author and artist has had reason to be grateful for the enterprise of tobacco firms. If you need details of motor-cars or railway trains, medals or trees, musical instruments

or prehistoric animals, the cigarette card will help you.

Probably the most dramatic example of the cigarette card as a reference work came to light during World War II. Players had issued a set of modern naval craft shortly before the outbreak of war; and after the war started a sudden and urgent demand came from a neutral country for these cards. Colonel C. L. Bagnall, D.S.O., M.C., head of a great British cigarette card firm, became suspicious. He was right. A captured U-boat had an album on board with the whole series.

I have several fine South African cigarette card albums in my library and possibly you have them, too. They are those excellent works on flowers, birds and history written and illustrated by experts and published early in World War II. Luckily these

masterpieces came out before trade cards were banned on account of paper shortage. Here you see the cigarette card as a little work of art; and though the cards are small the details are all there. This may be a hobby for children but the thousands of collectors all over the world include many intellectuals of all ages.

Cartophilists have their own literature, magazines and catalogues, their own technical jargon, like philatelists. They speak of "beauties" when referring to anonymous girls on cards. "Blankets" are pieces of wool or other fabric with coloured patterns once found in American cigarette packets. Tiny rugs, leather decorations, celluloid buttons for lapels and miniature gramophone records have all been presented to smokers. "Booklets" include English-French

dictionaries, calendars and sporting fixture cards. The world of the cartophilist is full of unexpected discoveries. Those who changed their brands of cigarettes often enough found a stereoscopic card one day, a “pop-out” or cut-out the next, cards with a figure that stands up. “Secret marks” are rare in cartophily but some of the Wills cards have them as marks of identification. (There have been forgeries; for example Hignett’s early series of actresses, so rare that they fetched thirty pounds a set.) Collectors speak of “retired cards” when they are dealing with sets that have been withdrawn for some reason, as a result of errors or objectionable subject matter.

How much are cigarette cards worth? Certainly they are not in the same class as postage stamps though the

rarities are valuable. Colonel Bagnall, founder of the Cartophilic Society of Great Britain, had fourteen million cards in his house, insured for thousands of pounds. Some of his six thousand sets were worth sixpence, others sixty pounds. Wills ordered a set of fifty cards dealing with the life of King Edward VII. That unhappy monarch was shown in uniform as a midshipman in 1912, as an officer on the Western Front in World War I and so on.

He abdicated before the set was issued but a few sets reached collectors and these now fetch huge prices. A recent catalogue in my library gives the prices of many series issued in South Africa. Wix of London and Johannesburg put out a cinema cavalcade now valued at five pounds a set, while their “age of

power and wonder” series fetches the same amount. Lambert and Butler printed a Rhodesian series more than forty years ago that fetches ten shillings and their Rhodesian fauna of the same period brings in five shillings more. Franklyn, Davey of Bristol issued a bird series years ago that is regarded as one of the most beautiful sets in the world. Those birds seldom come on the market but a set was sold a long time ago for sixty pounds. Fred Bason, author of the pioneer work on cartophily, owner at one time of two million cards, estimated that an Ogden set of six thousand cards (all different) issued in 1900 had risen in value to one thousand pounds.⁴ Only one

complete set was known to collectors. Another rarity is the set of twenty-five John Player cards showing dogs’ heads painted by Arthur Wardle; they were withdrawn for some unknown reason and are almost unobtainable. Condition is important, of course, for a bent card is like a postage-stamp lacking perforations. Cards must be clean and unfaded.

More than three thousand series of cigarette cards have been issued since the first Victorian lovelies appeared. With the aid of these cards you could start a garden, follow Scott to the South Pole, study the “Punch” cartoons of World War I,

“This is the last copy I possess and I am unlikely to get another copy. With its going there ends a page of my life that was very happy.”

⁴ I found a copy of Fred Bason’s rare handbook in the British Museum library recently. Bason had written on the title page:

learn the history of tobacco pipes, keep fit, make jam and carry out first aid. Cigarette cards reveal the universe of space craft and the world of our great-grandfathers. They were first produced for people who had never been to the cinema; indeed there were many in those days who could light a cigarette but could not read. As I have said, the cigarette card seldom approaches the value of a rare postage-stamp but many rightly claim that the intelligent series of cards are more interesting and informative than a set of stamps.

It is a poor man's hobby. My catalogue shows that he can buy a whole set for a couple of shillings and fill a gap for a penny. I do not know what a beer mat or a matchbox costs but I think the cigarette card enthusiast is a more sensible type of

collector. Let us not forget those other trade cards, found in packets of sweets and cocoa, tea and soap, that are snapped up by cartophilists and listed in the catalogues. Such cards are usually large enough to give the artist or photographer more scope for his skill than the tobacco issues. A number of bilingual series have been issued in South Africa by a tea firm. Subjects include African wild life and pets. The same firm designed a set of fifty cards dealing with motoring history and this is said to be the finest effort of its kind published since the war. All the natural colours of the cards have been preserved and the insignia of each maker is given. When you look through an album of cigarette and trade cards it may be as well to start

without a patronising smile. You may learn something.

Picture postcards first appeared in South Africa at about the same period as the early cigarette cards. Plain postcards were on sale at the General Post Office in Cape Town as far back as 1878 and eleven years later the Chartered Company issued postcards in Mashonaland. But the postcard boom came with the South African War, with portraits of the generals and pictures of the defence of Ladysmith and Mafeking. Collectors made a hobby of filling albums with cards on their favourite subjects; and people who were incapable of writing an intelligent letter summoned up sufficient energy to address a postcard and jot down the famous words: "Wish you were here."

Mr Frank Bradlow, the Africana collector and author, has a theory that the demand for the modern postcard arose in Cape Town as a result of illustrated notepaper and envelopes decorated with Cape scenes and designed by none other than the great Thomas Bowler. Subjects included St. George's Street and Table Bay and they were in use during the eighteen-forties. It was not until the eighteen-nineties that the true postcard became popular in Britain and elsewhere.

Among the South African postcard pioneers was T. D. Ravenscroft, who travelled over the Cape railway system in the eighteen-eighties taking publicity photographs. I have in my collection a coloured postcard of Saldanha Bay by Ravenscroft showing a green hillside, red-roofed houses and blue water. No doubt this

was printed overseas by some process which I cannot identify. (Ravenscroft continued in business until his death at Hermanus in 1948 at the age of ninety six; he was then the oldest professional photographer in the world.) The brothers Joe and David Barnett of Johannesburg and Cape Town were early camera men who produced historic South African postcards towards the end of last century. In the field of art R. O. Fusslein deserves honourable mention for he published that amusing series by Heinrich Egersdörfer called "Sketches of South African Life". The clever lithographic artist Egersdörfer worked for the "South African Illustrated News" (printed by Saul Solomon) and recorded Cape Town scenes at a time when most photographers kept to their studios. His

postcards reveal life in the country, mail coach adventures, hunting episodes and animal life. Nearly always there are touches of genuine humour. I like his scene outside a wayside hotel while the mail coach horses are being changed. A cocky little immigrant is trying to impress an Afrikaner girl in *kappie* and flowing skirt while the storekeeper gesticulates outside the bar and passengers take their tea on the stoep. Egersdörfer painted all the famous Cape Town spectacles, the Parade sales, the arrival of the mail boat, newsboys, Malays and convicts building the Hout Bay road. He was a prolific artist, a pictorial journalist who carried on the Bowler tradition in his own style. Sydney Carter, the distinguished painter who exhibited at the Royal Academy (and painted

Blaauwberg Strand village when I owned a cottage there) was another fine postcard artist.

I understand that the most valuable South African postcards are those printed in Ladysmith during the siege and smuggled out through the Boer lines by native runners. Other war postcards have VRI overprints on Orange Free State cards; and there are similar overprints on Transvaal Republic cards found in Pretoria during the British occupation. Picture postcards of South African battle scenes by the American artist R. Caton Woodville are prized by collectors.

The golden age of the postcard coincided with the progress of motoring and aviation. Search your attic for early cars, aeroplanes and steam trains for you may have cards

worth several pounds apiece. Then there are the cards made of thin ivory sent out by an Indian potentate; collectors seldom come across those costly prizes. Open an old postcard album and you turn the clock back. It may hold anything from a popular song of yesterday to a zeppelin; memories of the 'good old days'. Here is a blue card with a moonlight effect; over the page is an ugly public building tricked out like a palace with the aid of tinsel. One firm placed a card on the market enabling lovers to send kisses by post. You could also buy "squeaker" cards and "smellie" cards; press the right spot and you heard a sound or breathed in perfume. Birds on certain cards were decked out in real feathers while pretty girls had genuine human hair.

Emblems of luck and love adorn a million cards. Travel and postcards go together, like love and marriage. The great postcard mania has ended but the traveller still buys a postcard to show his loved ones that he has not forgotten them; and possibly to arouse envy in his friends. As a rule the postcard message is brief and simple, but one of those irritating microscopic writers succeeded in writing more than twenty thousand words on one card with a steel pen .

South Africa has never had a Donald McGill, the postcard king who played for the belly laugh and drew on timid vicars and English seaside landladies for his characters. I have a few of the "Cape Town types" series, painted about the time of Union, in which an anonymous artist lampooned the familiar characters of his

day; but the joke-card is noticeably absent in South Africa. Perhaps we do not want our self-esteem punctured; or possibly our seaside folklore does not lend itself to McGill's hearty caricatures or the none too subtle double-entendre. The nearest approach, I think, is the South African classic depicting a thirsty, shabby customer in a bar at that happy period when everyone poured his own measure. The barman is gazing anxiously at the glass and saying: "*Gashle, colonel!*"

Some of the finest camera studies on postcards were those of Mrs Caleb Keen. She found marvellous characters among the Cape Malays. More than sixty years ago the Central News Agency published a postcard series of Cape Town scenes in colour. I have one of the flower-

sellers in Adderley Street with a row of hansom-cabs in the middle of the thoroughfare.⁵ It is dated by the clothes, the cloth-caps and the buildings. Publishing firms destroyed thousands of obsolete cards in those days and employed itinerant photographers to keep in touch with progress all over the country. Thus a great deal of valuable Africana went up in smoke. My own favourite series, forgotten now by all save a few, was commissioned by Stephan Brothers to draw attention to their “West Coast watering place - lovely Langebaan”. There is the old,

⁵ Mrs Susan Ferreira, who died in 1970 at the age of 62, was a flower-seller for half a century. Many photographs were taken of her with her tub of flowers on the Grand Parade, and some of these pictures appeared on chocolate boxes and postcards.

isolated village; the whaling station at Salamander Bay with the pre-fabricated houses Hans Ellefsen brought from Iceland. There, too, is the S.S. Burton Port alongside Ellefsen's clipper hulk Emily Faith full; the little coaster Burton Port that vanished without trace during World War I. These cards emphasise the value of the postcard as historical material. Places change out of all recognition but if the postcards have captured them they are safe. You can follow the growth of a village all through this century; the women with Edwardian hats and trailing dresses, the men wearing tight and ridiculous clothes that reappear after many decades. More serious postcard collectors preserve their memories of places in this way; the postcard album is as vivid as a cinema film.

They have not only the background but the life of the place over a long period. Buildings that have been destroyed rise from the dust. Art collectors also find the postcard useful for there cannot be a gallery in the world that does not place its treasures on postcards. You can buy reproductions of water-colours by J. W. George and Edith Struben, oils by Thomas Baines and Claes Rietschoof, and these interesting pictures are to be found in the Africana Museum, Johannesburg.

Fusslein's series of animal postcards form part of the South African Library postcard collection. Egersdörfer was the artist, and his waterbuck and flamingoes are memorable. He showed a blue wildebees attacked by hyenas, a watchful leopard waiting in a tree

and a zebra mare edging her foal away from a puffadder. "Zebras still roam in large herds over the vast plains of South Africa in the less inhabited parts," this card informs us. My collection of South West African postcards may have some value now. They were printed superbly in Germany before 1914, some in full colour. These scenes transport me to the Teutonic buildings of Swakopmund, the diamond deserts, forts and castles with the black, white and red flag of the Kaiser's domains flying over them. Here are bygone soldiers in slouch hats, troops on camels, Herero prisoners-of-war, Captain Hendrik Witbooi and his staff, early motor-cars like steam-rollers, all the wild animals. You could illustrate a

history of South West Africa with these fine cards.

Many important Cape Town events during this century were recorded on postcards. The pageant of 1910 lives again. A Clifton panorama shows the old hotel but few other buildings. Tuck's coloured South African flower series (printed in Berlin) are accurate enough for a botanical text-book. Reproductions of South African postage stamps appear on some cards and there is a fine embossed card depicting the gold and silver Kruger coins. A German card takes us back to the days when ox-wagons moved up the Wilhelmstrasse in Windhoek. I have a card showing the police station, post-office and births and deaths registration office at Constantia in the year 1908. This pleasant rural scene in colour reveals

a quieter Constantia than the suburb of today. The police sergeant is in the garden with two children while his wife and baby in arms are framed in the doorway. Evidently no criminals are expected. A non-European postman is propping his bicycle against the wall of the little single-storeyed cottage. I never drive through Constantia nowadays without trying to identify the old building.

Christmas cards were all imported into South Africa until the Pretoria firm of Schweickerdt commissioned South African artists to paint typical scenery in Christmas card form. The Schweickerdts were dealing in paintings as far back as 1902 and they encouraged both Pieter Wenning and Pierneef to exhibit their work on the premises. Among the novelties I must give pride of place to the genuine

silver leaf postcards devised by the Maskew Miller firm. These cards have travelled all over the world by the thousand carrying the unique and beautiful Cape emblem. Others copied the idea with lucky beans and various botanical oddities but the silver leaf still reigns supreme.

CHAPTER TEN
TRAMCAR FAREWELL

*May there never come a day,
Be it ever yet so far,
When a child shall go to his Dad
and say,
As a youngster might in his
curious way,
What was a trolley car?"*

ROBERT S. WILSON

It was in a country tea-garden outside Cape Town that I came upon a tram-car that had been part of my life. One of the Oranjezicht single-decker trolley cars that clanged and groaned up the hill from my school in Orange Street to my home in Belvedere Avenue.⁶ When I saw the

tram again, serving as a sort of summer-house for tea drinkers, I also saw the motorman.

I have reason to remember him, for the man who took me home from school year after year was a Tristan da Cunha islander. His name was John Hagan, a large fair man of American descent with blue eyes and a blond moustache. I came to know him better when I was a young reporter, for the newspaper sent me to Tristan and Hagan was on board the man-o' war, going to see his old mother. Hagan had left the island during a lean period at the end of last century and had joined the tramways in 1902 after war service. It seemed an unusual occupation for a man

⁶ Trolley-car is the American term for tram-car. A long, spring-mounted pole held a

round, grooved wheel (the trolley) against the overhead wire.

from a lonely island, where the largest vehicle was a tiny bullock-cart. However, the tough young Hagan became an expert driver. He stood on the open platform handling the controls in all weathers; the man from Tristan survived the wind, sun, dust and rain, working a ten-hour day and earning every penny of his six shillings a day. (They paid out in gold sovereigns at that time.) He endured a seventy-hour week and thoroughly enjoyed his one day off a month on full pay. When his salary was raised to a princely three pounds ten shillings he felt wealthy. Hagan bought his own goggles, London policeman's cape, top boots. The horse-trams had only recently disappeared and the electric trams were the fastest things on the road. Power came from the tramway company's

own plant. There were times when the system was overloaded and it took Hagan half an hour to urge the little Oranjezicht tram up the hill. Oil lamps were blown out by the southeaster. On level routes the trams hauled trailers and the trailers often jumped the points and were derailed. Then the passengers got out and helped to push the car on to the rails.

Guards on the trams walked round a precarious outside platform collecting fares. Seats ran across the width of the car and passengers assisted by passing coins, tickets and change. Canvas curtains were let down in wet weather but the protection was incomplete. The four-wheeled cars on the runs from the city to Wynberg, Sea Point and Oranjezicht were nicknamed "bucking bronchos" for they jumped in alarming fashion.

Just after the South African War there was so much unemployment that attorneys, architects and other professional men were glad to find posts as tramway motormen and conductors.

Before the tramlines were laid the Cape Peninsula was served by passenger wagons. They started outside Mr George Woodgate's shop in Burg Street as far back as 1801 and they ran to Simonstown. Three decades later an omnibus drawn by three horses was put on the Heerengracht-Wynberg run. Tramlines were provided on the Sea Point, Gardens and Toll Gate routes in the eighteen-sixties and the horse-tram era opened. They were still in use almost at the end of the century so that there are still a few very old Capetonians who can remember the

double- and single-decker horse-drawn cars. Thomas Bowler showed them in his "Pictorial Album of Cape Town" published in 1865, with letterpress by W. R. Thomson. There was a view of the Presbyterian Church in Somerset Road and Thomson wrote: "The most conspicuous object in the immediate foreground is one of the comfortable and commodious cars of the Cape Town and Green Point Tramway Company. The company was formed and commenced operations about four years ago, its object being to provide safer and quicker transport to passengers between Cape Town and Sea Point than was offered by the old lumbering and uncomfortable omnibuses then on the road. Tram rails were ordered from England and laid under the supervision of Mr Bisset,

C.E. from Long Street to a terminus near Sir William Hodges' residence about three and a half miles from town. The well-built and handsomely-fitted cars were constructed in the Colony."

The tramway offices were in the Y.M.C.A. building in Long Street. The company wished to set up a town terminus at a property owned by a Mr Bigley in Longmarket Street; but greedy Bigley opened his mouth too wide when he asked for three thousand pounds. The deal was called off and everyone went to the Y.M.C.A. to catch the tram. Stables were built in Sea Point, hence the name Tramway Road. Mr F. J. B. Langerman, a tramway company director who was a judge of horse-flesh, selected four dozen of the finest horses the Melcks and Girds

and other farmers could provide. Ten miles an hour was the top speed at that period; a speed only exceeded by the fire brigade or a doctor racing to a patient. However, the tramway drivers were allowed to travel fast when handling the "Special Express" to and from Sea Point. This was a single-decker eight wheeler tram that ran at lunch time and other rush hours. For years the driver was an expert known as Fatty Adams, a coloured man who drove the four best horses standing up on his platform like a charioteer. The express went the whole way at the gallop save when a passenger neared his residence; then Fatty slowed down a little and the man jumped off. (There were no women in business and older men avoided the express.) Wepenaar was another

driver known to all Sea Pointers. Paddy Gale, a famous guard, organised a band which he conducted when off duty; and later he became landlord of the Langham in Long Street.

These early tramcars often slipped off the rails as the flanged wheels did not grip firmly. Cars nearly always came off when turning into Somerset Road but the red-capped drivers with their grey uniforms soon restored the service. The gauge was four feet eight and a half inches. Cars held twenty sitting inside and twelve standing. The company transported more than one hundred and twenty thousand passengers in 1865, only four or five years after the first horse tramways came into operation in England. The fare to Sea Point was sixpence, children half price and a

monthly ticket cost one pound. There were six trams each way on weekdays, five on Saturdays. It was possible to hire an extra car in Long Street or Sea Point for one pound and a smaller car was available for ten shillings. After nine at night the company charged double, but large parties found it more economical to hire a tramcar than a fleet of cabs.

Another company called City Tramways operated from Darling Street to Toll Gate. This small concern had to build a bridge over the Castle moat before the line could be opened. A bell rang at Toll Gate before the tram started. The open trams on this route were nicknamed "toast-racks" and two lines of passengers sat back to back. Water-trams were used for laying the dust. Directors and their friends enjoyed a wonderful outing

when the horse-tram route to the Gardens was opened in the eighteen-eighties. Another excursion took place not long afterwards when a tram-car built in Cape Town was placed on the new line. It was a teak car with brightly polished framework, comfortable upholstery and "spacious accommodation above and below". Only the iron wheels and springs were imported. It cost one hundred and seventy five pounds, a saving of one hundred pounds compared with an imported car. However, the directors spent some of the money entertaining guests to lunch at the International Hotel, terminus of the line. Rails were laid to Mowbray in the early eighteen-nineties. Cape Town clung to the horse-trams.

Meanwhile a self-propelled steam tram, followed by battery operated

tramcars, appeared in Kimberley and these marvels were watched with interest by the Cape Town tramway directors. I became a "juice fan", as the Americans say, very early this century when I rode from Market Square, Kimberley, to Alexandersfontein seven miles away by electric tram. This was the first electric tramway in Africa and some claim that it was the first in the world. However, I have an idea that the German line near Berlin (1881) and the line at Richmond, Virginia, U.S.A. (1887) were earlier ventures. Alexandersfontein was styled an hotel and I lived there with my parents. It was really a sort of country club run by De Beers for its prestige value; and the electric tramway formed part of this luxurious picture.

Cape Town sold its horse-trams to a Paarl company and in August 1896 the first electric tram-cars were placed on the rails. The ten new cars, built in Philadelphia, U.S.A., had cost about one thousand pounds apiece. Adderley Street was decorated. Trams covered with flags moved in line ahead to the corner of Darling Street and there Mr J. W. Attwell the mayor and other officials stepped on board. A long battle had ended. Many people feared that Cape Town's population of sixty thousand would be in danger. Would the brakes stop a tramcar at once? They were assured that every wheel could be locked by the brake and the motor reversed "so that there was more control over a car going eight or even ten miles an hour by the new electrical system than with the horse-

drawn cars going at six miles an hour".

So the Cape Parliament decided to allow the electric tramcars to operate in Adderley Street and elsewhere but the limit was fixed at seven miles an hour. Drivers and guards had to be specially trained and licensed. Each car had to be equipped with five incandescent lamps and the lines had to be carefully maintained and repaired. A final protest was made in the House of Assembly by a farmers' representative who pointed out that the farmers were making two hundred thousand pounds a year by the sale of forage. Electric tramways did not consume forage and certain farmers would be ruined. He sat down amid shouts of "Rubbish!" In quiet Paarl, however, opponents of horse-trams won the day and the

company found itself with a number of useless cars on its hands.

Cape Town crowds watched the opening ceremony with mixed feelings. One old man from the country was heard to say: "Good heavens, these English - using lightning instead of horses. God will punish us all for looking on." The first car was supposed to smash a bottle of champagne suspended across the track by coloured ribbons. As the car touched the ribbons the bottle swung neatly into the lap of Lady Sivewright, a privileged spectator seated among the mighty. The champagne then squirted into the street among jeers and shouts of regret. Travellers in the cars had a pleasant journey to Mowbray. At every street corner there were crowds waiting to cheer the electric

cavalcade. "The amazement depicted on the faces of the inhabitants of Woodstock, who turned out in numbers to watch the progress of the horseless trams, was amusing to watch," one reporter wrote. Some critics had expected horses to stampede when the trams approached but not a single horse appeared to notice the electric monsters. At the Mowbray terminus the cars reversed and returned to town "against a very cold wind". The guests were revived at a splendid lunch in the Opera House restaurant.

Soon after the opening came a demand for lower fares. "At the best the journey is a tedious one," wrote a grumbler. "The man or woman who would ride to Woodstock, that gehenna of windstorms and dust in summer, more often than is abso-

lutely necessary should take a single ticket to Robben Island.”

One day in 1900 a freighter entered Table Bay Docks with four tramcars lashed across her decks. They had been specially built for the Camps Bay line, which was opened the following year. They went over Kloof Nek with their carbon arc lamps ablaze, sending the baboons scuttling back into the forest. When these cars slipped on the rails during the long descent the driver dropped sand to help the wheels to grip. Once there was panic among the passengers when a car slipped badly while nearing a sharp turn with a drop beside the track. The sand device failed and the car jerked on. Fortunately sand had blown across the rails from a house under construction and so the driver was

able to regain control. They always supplied a box of fine sifted sand which could not block the pipes after that ordeal.

As the years passed the tramway lines stretched out to Wynberg. The round trip from Sea Point to Wynberg and back lasted three hours. John Hagan, my friend from Tristan, became a dispatcher between the world wars. During his career as a driver he had carried four hundred passengers a day; the total ran into millions. Hagan spoke the tramway lingo; passengers were “clients”, inspectors were “sharks” and old fashioned tram-cars were “brakes”. He saw the first trolley bus arrive in Cape Town in 1933, but the rail tram-cars had not yet passed out. That pioneer trolley-bus made a remarkable journey. It was built in

Johannesburg and the height was beyond the capacity of the railways. So a road trip was planned, the longest overland journey ever undertaken by a trolley-bus. Mr Fred Woodward, who organised the trek, coupled the tram to a powerful motor-lorry. He loaded the tram with four tons of sleepers to reduce the height so that it could pass through subways. Four hundred gallons of petrol and one hundred gallons of water were carried. Long detours were made to avoid dangerous mountain passes. The lorry and trolley-bus measured one hundred feet in length. Rainstorms lashed the vehicles, the men were grilled in the Karoo and between Prince Albert Road and Laingsburg they sank into deep mud. Nevertheless they reached Toll Gate ten days after leaving

Johannesburg. In March 1934 the trolley-bus was placed on the Gardens route.

Cape Town said farewell to the old tram-cars early in 1939, a sad time for all those who preferred rails to rubber tyres. Twelve drivers who felt they were too old to learn new tricks retired with the trams. Hagan remained on duty as dispatcher but he never drove a trackless tram. Souvenir tickets were issued for the last tramway trips between Adderley Street and Sea Point. There were wreaths and placards. "R.I.P. - Fading Away - Faithful to the End." They had fought a rearguard action against the 'buses and lost. No longer would they rumble past familiar terraces and shops or groan round the loops. People watched those tram-cars sadly, as though they

were losing old friends. And the passengers rode with aching hearts for the last time. Nostalgia spread from Adderley Street to Tramway Road. There were some who remembered the horse-cars being put out of business by electricity; now the electric power remained but the tramcar was disappearing.

Johannesburg held on to its tramways for years after sleepy old Cape Town had gone over to trolley-buses. They were running horse-trams in Johannesburg for a decade after Cape Town had switched to electric cars. Johannesburg, criss-crossed by tramlines, had two hundred electric tram-cars in the heyday of the service. So those addicts who missed the trams of Cape Town renewed their youth in Johannesburg, where the screeching

streetcars and “Kadallies” lingered like ghosts.

I doubt very much whether South Africa ever had a tram-car like the “Desire” made famous by Tennessee Williams or the odd cars used in the United States for special purposes. There were black funeral cars, sombre yet elegant, with a broad window displaying the coffin. Tram-car sleepers ran between American cities, fitted out with upholstered cabins and armchairs, lavatories and running water.

What happens to South Africa’s old tram-cars? One historic car of the Rhodes era has gone into the Kimberley mine museum. Others serve in honourable retirement as artists’ studios, cubicles at seaside resorts, playrooms for children, bungalows in remote places, roadside

stalls, diners and hamburger stands. One old wooden tram-car was towed from Cape Town by mules and came to rest on the slopes above Miller's Point. Peggy Morris described the furnishing of the tram-car with cretonne curtains, a paraffin-box settee and camp stretchers. Unfortunately it was invaded by cobras, puff adders and skaapstekers. Baboons visited the site and helped themselves to vegetables. A horse-tram was preserved in a Cape Town timber yard for many years and in 1929 it was still there. A tram-car lover wrote to the newspapers suggesting that this interesting relic should be given to the South African Museum. Kleinbaai in the Cape became the last resting place of a number of old electric tramcars not so long ago. An enterprising immigrant bought plots round

the bay and sold a bright tram-body with each plot. Diesel buses are making a hell of the cities where the silent trolley-cars once plied, but out on the veld and in obscure meadows the tram-cars live again.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE VANISHING TATTOO

PROFESSOR Labouchere looked most unlike a university man and I doubt very much whether Labouchere was his real name. However, there he was in a shop doorway close to Dock Road, the name above him in golden letters, the blazing emblems of his trade filling the window. He gave the impression of a man who would be in Cape Town for a month or two before departing for some other distant seaport. The professor was a tattoo artist. "Do not give your body into the hands of bodgers" was his slogan.

I entered his parlour without the slightest intention of emerging some time later with a dancing girl on my forearm or a full-rigger on my chest.

I was a journalist on duty. The professor, who obviously knew the value of publicity, invited me into his operating theatre and showed me his books of designs. South Africans anxious to proclaim the land of their birth could go out into the world carrying a prancing springbok, a silver leaf, an ox-wagon with team or a picture of the Union Buildings. A feminine client might be offered proteas, ericas or dainty butterflies; and with great delicacy, I am sure, Professor Labouchere would indicate the right spots for such adornment. He turned page after dazzling page and I noted some of the words, letters, numbers and pictures ranging in the professor's index from anchor to zoo. "In memory of my pal Jack" lingered in my mind.

“I’ve tattooed almost every part of the body from scalp to toe,” Labouchere claimed. “Strange ideas some people have, but of course it’s not my place to argue with them. I ask no questions. Men usually choose the arms or chest. A young chap coming in for the first time will probably have a heart with ‘Mom’ on it. I sell more of those than anything else. Seamen like mermaids or lighthouses or the names of their girl friends or a memorial stone, perhaps, with the name of a shipmate lost at sea. Sentimental chaps, they are, and it gives them a sort of satisfaction.”

This, I felt, was not the full explanation of the psychology of tattooing. I went into that later, but not with the help of Professor Labouchere. “Does it hurt much?” I inquired.

“Depends a lot on the man who does the job,” the professor answered with signs of pride. “Nowadays some people like to have a local anaesthetic but I can work for half an hour with my electric needle without the client even moaning. I started forty years ago using a hand instrument like a pen-holder with needles set into it. We had soot or ink for a blue-black design in those days and brick-dust for red colouring. Those are still the popular shades but I’ve got thirty colours now. It was slow work in the old days and if you pressed heavily on the needles the client’s skin might not heal for a couple of weeks. Then someone invented a clockwork needle that saved a lot of time. Now we have a whole set of electric needles, a single needle for sketching the outline of the design, a bunch of

needles for each colour. I can give you a snake round your wrist in a couple of hours - the electric needle vibrates so fast that it rides beautifully over the flesh. No more than a tickle, I assure you. But if you wanted the sinking of the Titanic on your back - well, that would take a couple of weeks." Professor Labouchere gazed at me speculatively but I shook my head. He was unaware of the fact that I had dodged inoculations all my life with great success, even in the army.

"You're not ambitious," declared the professor severely. "King George V now, he had a wonderful dragon tattooed on his left arm when he was in Japan as a midshipman. King Frederik IX of Denmark - he's got a fine art gallery on his chest and arms. Lady Randolph Churchill was

tattooed. And what do you think Monty had done on his arm? A butterfly. Can you imagine a field marshal with a butterfly?" It so happened that I could. I asked Professor Labouchere about the truly great designs in the tattooists' range; not silly little butterflies or flowers but something on the same scale as Rembrandt's "Night Watch". The professor almost went into a trance; then he looked up in triumph.

"I've never seen it but I know it's true and I'd tackle it myself if someone came along and ordered it," he asserted. "I'm thinking now of the fox and the hounds. Lord Charles Beresford had it - the admiral who was a great friend of King Edward VII. Of course it was done in Japan. I've got to admit that some of those Tokyo tattoo artists do very refined

work. Anyway, the fox and hounds cover the whole of a man's back and they go on below the waistline. You see the riders in scarlet, the horses, the dogs, all in full cry and in glorious colours. You don't see the fox - only the brush. The fox is taking cover, you understand, and he's only got one place to go. That's a really great tattoo and very rare, very rare. Costs a bit of money, the fox and the hounds, but the man who owns that scene can be proud of it."

I felt that at last I had almost glimpsed a masterpiece even more spectacular than the *Titanic* disaster. Professor Labouchere assured me that one design often led to another until it was hard to find a bare patch on the body of a true enthusiast. He knew one man who had a hinge tattooed at every joint of his body.

Lions were popular, he said, with snakes next and dogs third. He was often asked to do a carrier pigeon with a message. Shamrocks, thistles and American eagles were part of the tattoo artist's bread and butter. Seamen would go to a tattoo artist in every port and add the name of the place to the lists on their bodies. This reminded me of the traveller with suitcases plastered with labels. Of course the globe-trotting tattoo addict comes to resemble an art gallery with a wide variety of paintings in different styles, some more pleasing than others.

Women often ask a tattooist for beauty spots, their own initials and false eyelashes. One lady with a number of admirers had their names tattooed on her arms. A pale girl asked for a delicate blush on her



"Professor Labouchere assured me that one design often led to another until it was hard to find a bare patch on the body of a true enthusiast!"

cheeks. Married women sometimes order a ring for the proper finger. They favour the smaller designs, a necklace or a bracelet; the "all-over" is usually encountered only in show business. Some of you may remember the World War I song that went to the tune of "My Home in Tennessee":

*I paid a lot to see
The tattooed Scotch lady
Tattooed from head to knee
She was a sight to see.*

Nevertheless the floral garter on one leg is far more common. The pansy is the flower in strong demand, the romantic flower of memory and hope. It was customary towards the end of last century for members of various trades to carry appropriate tattoo marks. A carpenter would have a plane, a mason a trowel and a

locksmith a key. A man leading a horse was a carter while a groom preferred a horse's head. Butchers wore ox-heads and gunsmiths had pistols. A jockey was shown on horseback while a miner had a pick-axe. Soldiers liked bugles, shoemakers had boots and a musician displayed a neat lyre. There was a long period when many a naval seaman carried Lord Nelson on his chest. Other patriots liked to have a bulldog or a Union Jack; and in a well-known medical museum there is a huge St. George and the Dragon taken from a man's back. One enthusiastic sportsman had his torso covered with pheasants, grouse, sporting dogs and shotguns. Gamblers go in for dice and cards. George Burchett, the celebrated London tattoo artist, the Michelangelo of the

trade, covered his wife in pleasing designs. He turned a British Army major into a zebra and sent many an Australian away with kangaroos and boomerangs all over his body. "It's a bit of romance I suppose," Burchett often remarked. "Gives a fellow a kind of atmosphere and makes him different from other people. A lovely job, tattooing. I ran away to sea as a boy with a tattoo outfit and made a pint of money. The world's your oyster in this trade."

Burchett proved this statement in 1910, when a South African diamond magnate took such a fancy to his work that he invited him to visit Johannesburg at his expense. There Burchett tattooed his wealthy client from neck to toe; reproductions of famous paintings were among the subjects selected. Soon afterwards

Burchett sent for his wife and family and they remained in South Africa for three years. Burchett's masterpiece during this period was a portrait of President Kruger on a bald head. Burchett revelled in facial tattooing; he would tint a client's complexion, shade the eyes and lips, whiten a red nose and disguise scars. Jacobus van Duyn, the criminal who described himself as "the worst man in the world", bore some of Burchett's designs. Burchett claimed that a British army officer escaped from savages in Matabeleland because of the fearsome dragons Burchett had tattooed on his chest and back. Burchett also tattooed a dragon on a South African criminal and the man was identified by this design in Australia and arrested.

Tattoo marks played an important part in the classic Tichborne case. The real Sir Roger Tichborne was not tattooed whereas the impostor, Thomas Castro, had a scarred forearm from which tattoo marks had been removed. Criminologists have pointed out that tattooing has a limited value as a means of identification as several people may carry identical designs. In some countries the police have asked surgeons and tattoo artists to report people who come to them for erasures.

Cape Town people first became aware of the art of tattooing when the American whalers began calling at Table Bay early last century. The tough crews had previously visited Japan, where the tattooists had pricked delicate patterns like decorations on silk. Proudly the whaler men

revealed their Japanese dragons (supposed to keep evil away), their fans and ferocious animals. Old newspapers describe the showmen who came along later with tattooed dwarfs, fat ladies embroidered with frogs and freaks with bright tapestries. I read a description of a circus strong man who had an eagle across his shoulders. The tattooist had made such clever use of the contours of the body that the eagle appeared to be beating its wings when the strong man flexed his muscles.

My next informant was a medical specialist with naval experience. I still wanted to know why intelligent people allowed themselves to be mutilated by tattoo artists. "Quite a lot of them have had too much to drink," said the doctor bluntly.

“During the war, I remember, some British blue jackets had been having a drunken argument with an American seaman in an Eastern seaport. He called the British seamen ‘Limeys’. When the American woke up next morning he found an inscription tattooed on his chest: ‘Rule Britannia’.”

Tattooing, went on my medical friend, went back a long way. Egyptian mummies dating back to 2000 B.C. bear tattoo marks. Africa is tattooed from end to end. Cave paintings show that primitive man was tattooed. Livingstone noted that the tattoo marks of the Matambwee people resembled the drawings of the ancient Egyptians; wavy lines used as symbols for water and trees and gardens enclosed in squares. Seamen used to be tattooed so that they could

be identified and given Christian burial if they were drowned and flung ashore. There is, however, an alternative explanation of the huge and detailed Crucifixion scene chosen by many British naval seamen last century; this was tattooed on their backs and was their traditional defence against the brutal floggings of that era. In later years, of course, tattooing has been discouraged or forbidden in naval training ships. When a seaman is old enough to decide for himself he may have a gorgeous bird or a five pound note tattooed just to prove that he has grown up. Tradition has a lot to do with it. Comparatively few men in the Royal Air Force are tattooed, whereas soldiers have always been tattoo clients. Lord Roberts instructed officers going to the South

African War to have some tattoo work done so that they could be identified if they were killed in action. That was a period when tattooing was tremendously popular.

Criminals were and still are extremely fond of tattoo marks. This queer taste is naturally of great assistance to the police but the criminal never seems to realise it. He enjoys having a dotted line tattooed round his neck with the words: "Cut here". He finds pleasure in carrying a picture of guillotine or gallows on his back. Years ago tattooing was a prison hobby in many countries; it helped to pass the time. Of course the designs were not always aimed at the reformation of the criminal and revenge was often the motif. "Death to the police." Malassen, a French murderer of the last century, was

covered with tattoo marks. "I made a bad start - I shall make a bad end," his chest proclaimed. He became official executioner in a French penal colony. Criminals seldom blame themselves for their misfortunes. Among the favourite sentiments of prison tattooists are these: "No luck for me." "Born under an evil star." "Life's a fraud." One prisoner, evidently blessed with a Walter Mitty complex, had himself tattooed in the complete uniform of a general. A humorist chose this slogan: "Long Live France and fried potatoes."

Can tattoo marks be removed effectively? It is easy enough to cover a bygone girl friend's name with a peacock but the restoration of the skin to its previous blankness is another matter. Some pigments fade naturally but designs carried out with

gunpowder and charcoal cannot be erased. Ordinary surgery leaves a scar. My friend the doctor said that a skin graft was one solution of the problem. He repeated a legend often told by seafaring men of a sailor who fell in love with a native girl in some remote tattooed community. The men of the tribe would accept the sailor only if he would be tattooed like the others; and this involved facial markings. The sailor agreed and claimed his girl with blue waves on his cheeks and a large blue shark across his forehead. Months or years afterwards a visiting ship from his home port brought news that made the sailor long to return to civilisation. He asked the medicine man to remove the tattoo marks and the process was carried out with apparent success. Only faint lines

remained where the designs had been pricked in. The sailor departed, leaving his girl with a young child. She seemed to think he would return one day and so he did - with the tattoo marks as vivid as ever they had been, shark and all. It is a story that is told from East Africa to New Zealand, wherever the ancient art of tattooing is practised. Laser beams are now being employed to explode the tattoo dyes out of the skin. This causes a minimum of pain and scarring. Like ordinary light the beam passes almost unobstructed through the transparent skin, hits the coloured dye particles and chars and crusts the tattoo. Sandpapering and acids have been tried but these methods are useless. Bleaches affect the colour of the skin. "Most people curse the day they committed this

folly,” summed up the doctor. “What must a man think when he views the backs of his hands over the years and sees a girl’s head and the words ‘True Love’?”

It was clear that the doctor was strongly opposed to tattooing except for medical purposes. The code letter of a blood group might be useful. Now and again a client asks the tattooist to place on his hide a notification to doctors of his allergies and serum sensitivities. Certain types of birthmarks can be camouflaged by tattooing. Doctors prefer the term “pigment injection”. They do not wish to be confused with Professor Labouchere and his dancing girls.

Yes, the tattooing of the commercial sort is folly. I can understand some of the motives but there are many facets of tattooing psychology that

elude me. African warriors who carry their battle honours on their thighs are merely observing an old tribal custom, like the head-hunters who tattoo a souvenir for each victim. But I have known men of education who have given way to this primitive impulse. Lombroso, the Italian anthropologist, classified lunatics as harmless or dangerous according to the tattoo marks they bore. Dr C. J. Polson, barrister and professor of forensic medicine, has listed a number of motives: the clan spirit, amorous feelings (including a portrait of the loved one), filial piety (tombstones and graves). But he places adornment as the leading influence and mentions some of the artistic designs he has seen; for example, a beautiful flight of birds on a woman’s shoulders and thighs.

Charles Darwin the naturalist declared that the man who allowed himself to be tattooed was of the type that drew rude pictures on walls. Professor R. S. Post of Wisconsin, a more recent observer, has said that many tattooed people are exhibitionists; their motives, known or subconscious, are sexual. Some tattoo marks, he found, were badges of identification and he quoted the procurer who displayed an eagle carrying off a girl.

Tattoo, the origin of this expressive word, is a mystery. Probably it comes from the Dutch word *taptoe* (also found in Afrikaans) meaning to beat the tattoo when the canteens closed. The “tat tat tat” of the professor’s implements reminded someone of the drum beats. It is strange to find the word *tatau*

(meaning “to mark”) in the Tahitian language. Tattooing is traditional in the Pacific islands. Primitive tattooists use the same methods all over the world, suggesting that the ancient custom is derived from the same original source. Africans specialise in gashing, tattooing by cuts and leaving raised cicatrices. Cuts on the cheeks are often coloured red and blue. Tattooing of the chin is so widespread that anthropologists think there must have been pre-historic intercourse between the two hemispheres. Tribesmen use flakes of quartz, thorns, the teeth of sharks. Captain James Cook remarked two centuries ago: “The universality of tattooing is a curious subject for speculation.”

Indeed it is. Tattooing did not reach Europe as a fashion until last

century. Now it is said to be vanishing. The art is in decline. Even an adolescent realises that the surest way of coming to hate someone is to have their name tattooed on his body. No longer do seamen believe that tattooing is a defence against extremes of climate, disease and insect bites. Tattooed maps are all very well for a treasure hunt and a novelist may imagine a last will and testament tattooed on a shipwrecked mariner's back. But in real life the gay and licentious tattoo is vanishing like the fox in the famous design.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CHAMBER OF HORRORS

THE poster outside the shop in Castle Street announced "South Africa's Greatest Waxworks Show and Chamber of Horrors". I was soon disillusioned. The touch of genius that made Madame Tussaud world famous was missing. This was a shoddy fraud; yet I have reason to remember the experience, but not because of the waxworks. The proprietor was a glib and quick-witted little fellow of the type encountered on fairgrounds; and having taken the admission money he was obviously anxious to hustle his patrons on into the Chamber of Horrors - for an additional shilling, of course. Indeed there was nothing to hold the onlookers spellbound in the outer room. He had an unlikely

President Kruger there, a "sleeping beauty" without the slightest appeal, an unflattering General Louis Botha and an almost libellous Smuts. Evidently these figures had been made a long time ago and had suffered during their travels on the road. In this outer room one did not rub shoulders with history. I was aware only of the fact that some people have strange ways of making a living.

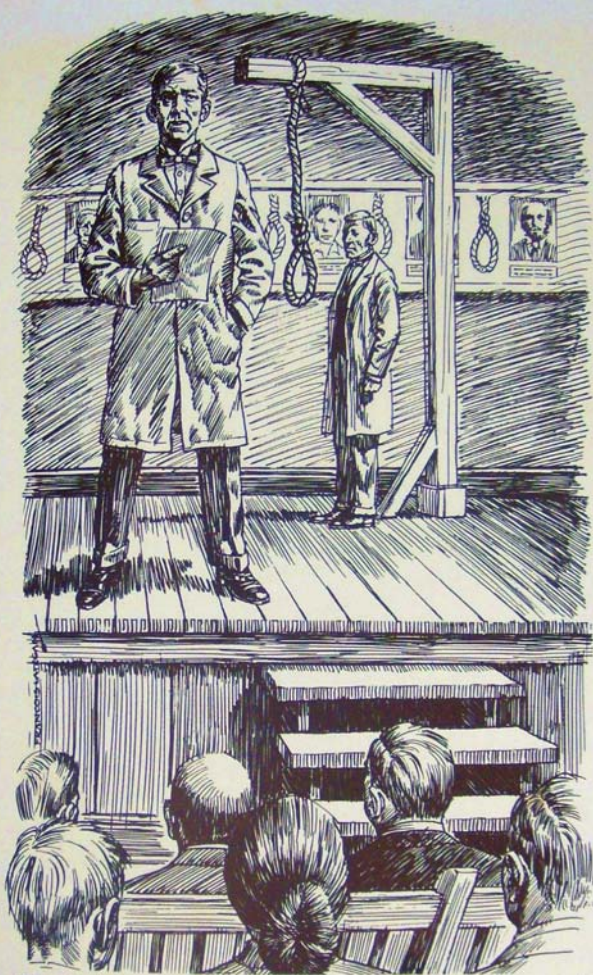
The proprietor glanced at his watch. "In exactly five minutes' time you will hear a lecture by a retired prison warder in the Chamber of Horrors," he informed the crowd. "This warder has worked in all the well-known gaols of South Africa from the old Breakwater Prison to the Pretoria Central. He has known most of the murderers of his time and the official

hangmen. For one shilling extra you can listen to Mister Gerber and ask him questions - a treat you will never forget. This way please ladies and gentlemen.”

I paid eagerly and I think everyone else joined the queue and entered the Chamber of Horrors. Here again the standard of modelling left much to be desired and even the morbid curiosity of the crowd must have suffered a shock. The coils of rope on the walls, each one with its sinister noose, might or might not have been used to hang the criminals named on the labels. The gallows scene appeared to have been knocked together by a carpenter who had never seen a gallows in his life; and the little group under the beam, the executioner, chaplain, warders and condemned man on the drop, all

looked as battered and weary as the “sleeping beauty” outside. Blood-stained axes and knives failed to convince anyone that they had cut into human flesh. Portraits of poisoners and stranglers appeared almost respectable. In this ghoul’s playground, I felt, one might spend the dark hours without fear of the wax figures coming to life at midnight.

All now depended on Gerber. He came in wearing a white coat, like a laboratory assistant, mounted the steps and addressed us from the gallows platform. The pale face that had made thousands of convicts shiver was lined with worry; he might have been due for hanging within the next few minutes. I imagine, however, that a retired warder is not unduly prosperous and



"He came in wearing a white coat, like a laboratory assistant, mounted the steps and addressed us from the gallows platform"

he may have had money troubles. He was a large man and I pictured him swinging the cat-o'-nine tails that decorated one of the walls.

"There is a mistaken idea that women don't often get hanged in South Africa," Gerber began, his menacing eyes roving over the faces below him and resting for a second or two (so it seemed) on likely feminine listeners. "Make no mistake, many women have been hanged and I've got them all here in my book. I also have accounts of some executions that were bungled, horribly bungled. That was in the old days, of course. Don't be alarmed. Nothing like that happens now."

The audience sighed with relief and Gerber opened his book. He was no great lecturer but his subject was so compelling that everyone strained to

hear every word. Gerber started with a girl named Flora Kleinfeldt who had murdered "young Thackwray" (probably a child) at Grahamstown and had been hanged in public. Next on his list was a coloured woman who had murdered her husband at Graaff-Reinet; she was cut down moaning and waving her arms and had to be hanged again. As a contrast, Gerber described the execution of two Hottentot soldiers, Meyer and Windvogel, at Grahams-town. No bungling on that occasion. They knelt on their coffins and the firing squad avenged the death of Ensign Crowe. Gerber mentioned an unhappy episode in which four natives and a Hottentot were hanged simultaneously from the same gallows. The beam broke and all the men fell to the ground and lay

begging for mercy. Carpenters worked for nearly an hour and the doomed five were hanged again successfully.

In reply to questions Gerber gave dates and other details. His grim case book was filled with notes and newspaper cuttings and when I checked the information later I found a high degree of accuracy. Cradock, went on Gerber, was the scene of an execution at which the hangman adjusted the noose with so little skill that it almost slipped over the condemned man's head. The victim suffered for a long time. All went well at Graaff-Reinet when Rabie and Mrs Liebenberg were taken out on an ox-wagon to the place of execution about a mile from the village. They were accompanied by the ministers Murray and Van Lingen and a large

assembly sang hymns at the gallows. "The condemned man and woman met death quietly and were buried by their friends," said Gerber. "But there was a painful scene at Worcester when a native named Toontje was hanged. The rope broke and they had to find a strong riem before the execution could be carried out."

Gerber had a cutting from the "Cape Chronicle" about a Griqua named Andries Appels who had murdered Mrs Russouw at Fauresmith. The rope was too short to reach the man's neck and even when he stood on his coffin it was still too short. Dr Niebe, the helpful district surgeon, then went to the aid of the hangman and asked the co-operative Appels to stand on his toes. With an effort the noose was hauled round the man's neck. He hung from the gallows for half an

hour and the doctor then gave a free anatomy lesson by dissecting the body in front of the crowd. According to the newspapers this was a harrowing spectacle and friends of Appels were offended.

Another unpleasant scene was reported at the execution of the “hoary-headed murderer” Hans de Lange in Pietermaritzburg. One newspaper said it was “perfect butchery”. Gerber read an extract from the “Cape Argus” suggesting that friends of De Lange had taken the body away and resuscitated him. By sheer chance I came across a document that gave the whole truth of this extraordinary story. Hans de Lange, aged seventy, was a farmer in the Klip River district of Natal during the eighteen-sixties. In that wild era there were many murders with natives as the victims

and the murderers often went unpunished. Captain G. A. Lucas, a Birkenhead survivor, was appointed magistrate of Ladysmith at this period and he made it known that in future he would hunt down and punish any man, white or black, who committed murder. De Lange shot a native dead and Lucas rode to the farm and arrested him. De Lange was a patriarch with a fine record as a warrior in voortrekker days; a handsome man with a snow white beard over his chest. He had drunk hard for many years and the Ladysmith gaol doctor allowed him one or two bottles of Hollands gin a day. At the trial half the jury were Afrikaners. De Lange was convicted and sentenced to death. Lucas asked for a troop of Cape Mounted Rifles to be sent to Ladysmith as there were

rumours of an attempt to rescue De Lange. A deputation visited the governor of Natal and offered a wagonload of sovereigns for a reprieve but the governor refused.

The scaffold was built about a quarter of a mile from the gaol. Captain Lucas warned the sheriff that De Lange was a very heavy man, so that the hangman should not give him a long drop. Next morning at seven o'clock the officer in charge of the Cape Mounted Rifles found that even after swallowing a glass of brandy he was unable to carry out his duties. Captain Lucas then took charge of the proceedings. Lucas ordered the troops to load with ball cartridge and went into the gaol. He was very much upset himself. Then the sheriff and the halfcaste hangman entered the cell. De Lange's eyes

blazed when he saw the hangman and he said: "You blackguard, so you have come to hang your father." Lucas offered to take De Lange to the gallows in his trap but the old man preferred to walk. At the gallows Lucas again told the sheriff that too much drop had been given but the hangman took no notice. Lucas mounted his horse. Elders of the Dutch Reformed Church went on to the platform and consoled De Lange. The bolt was drawn and, as Lucas feared, the rope broke.

Lucas dismounted, went under the scaffold and held the old man in his arms until he had recovered from the shock. De Lange opened his eyes at last and asked: "Must it be done over again?" Lucas said it must. "You are still kind to me," declared De Lange. "Would you do me a last favour?"

Come on the scaffold with me and bold my hand to the last.” Lucas consented. The second hanging was effective. But the bungling at the first attempt aroused the feelings of the people of Ladysmith and both the sheriff and the hangman had to take refuge in another district. De Lange was not revived, but his body was taken away by friends and the rumour arose soon afterwards.

After this research of my own I return to Gerber and his lecture. He told us that when Klaas Davids, a Hottentot of eighteen, was hanged in front of the gaol in King Williamstown there were one thousand people present. All the prisoners were brought out under guard to watch the execution. The hangman, a white man, had blacked his face as a disguise. He was so nervous that he

nearly broke down during the preparations, but death was instantaneous. Then there was a less efficient execution at Durban when two natives were placed on the drop at once. One of the ropes broke. The other native placed a foot on each side of the drop and had to be forced down. At a Grahamstown execution the district surgeon complained that the rope was too thick, but the hangman disagreed. Hans Andries, the condemned man, struggled for seven minutes after the drop. His neck was not broken. In the eighteen-seventies, when executions were no longer held in public, the “Burgersdorp Gazette” reported that a murderer had been cut down before he was dead and resisted attempts to place him in a coffin. The hangman demanded a new warrant before he

would consent to hang the man again. Officials argued for hours. Then it was found that the man had died. A hangman at Winburg discovered that one of four Basutos he had hanged was not dead so the noose was adjusted for a second time. "The executioner pulled the man's legs to make sure," reported the "Cape Argus". A macabre note was struck by a Pretoria executioner towards the end of last century. This official did not wish to be recognised so he appeared in the condemned cell wearing a Father Christmas mask.

Gerber evidently decided that he had wrung our withers to the full extent. He informed us with a bright smile: "I shall now relate the true stories of a number of men and one woman who cheated the gallows." First of this fortunate list was a native who

had been sentenced to death at Burghersdorp in the middle of last century for the murder of a man named Van Dyk. Judge Menzies, who presided, was not feeling well and failed to sign the records. He died in his carriage on the way to Colesberg and so the death penalty could not be inflicted. The native was awarded a life sentence.

During the governorship of Sir George Grey a Bushman woman was sentenced to death at Worcester for murdering her child of four by holding him under water. A petition failed. The coffin was made, the gallows were set up, the hangman arrived. On the day before the execution the deputy sheriff and the hangman quarrelled; as a result the hangman saddled his horse and rode away. Next morning the problem

became even more complicated when it was found that the death cell was empty. They recaptured the Bushman woman in the mountains eight days later and she was sent to the House of Correction. Some years later she was released.

A native at Wodehouse was sentenced to death by Mr Justice Watermeyer for a murder in the Stormberg. The prosecution depended almost entirely on one eye-witness and the jury accepted this evidence. Soon after the trial ended four members of the jury approached the judge and informed him that they had discussed the case with the eye-witness and he had disclosed certain facts which had not come out in evidence. If they had been aware of these facts during the trial they would have brought in a verdict of

culpable homicide, not murder. The death sentence was commuted.

Gerber next quoted a statement by a minister of religion who visited a condemned Hottentot named Jantjie in a remote Karoo village. The minister entered the cell just after Jantjie had been informed by the sheriff that he was to be hanged within a few days.

“I was locked up with him alone, as usual, in a cell measuring ten feet by four and I sat in a chair at the foot of the bed,” reported the minister. “Jantjie, who had been calm during previous visits, now rolled his eyes, ground his teeth, clenched his fists and struck the air.” The warder said that Jantjie was shamming but the district surgeon was called. He tested Jantjie by sticking a penknife into his cheek. Jantjie took no notice but

went on raving. They had no strait-jacket in the gaol so they placed him in a muid sack and fastened it round his neck. Jantjie went on wriggling. “On the morning of the execution it was found to be utterly impossible to carry out the sentence and Jantjie was reprieved,” concluded the minister’s report.

Gerber informed us that it would be impossible nowadays to escape the hangman by rolling the eyes and gnashing the teeth. We believed him. On that note the lecture ended and we left the Chamber of Horrors wondering how on earth Jantjie had succeeded in making it utterly impossible to carry out the sentence.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN
A SWAN IN THE WINDOW

*The swan like the soul of the poet,
By the dull world is ill understood.*

HEINE

DOWN came the great bird with arched neck and curving wings, shining like strong white moonlight against the black curtains. I was not prepared for this beautiful vision in a Church Street shop window and I stopped in my tracks to stare at the swan. They say that taxidermy is becoming a lost art but here was the work of a master. I was not surprised to hear a familiar Scottish accent coming from the doorway; and there stood my old friend James Drury, a man I had known since my school-days. Yes, I visited his workshop in the South African Museum before

World War I and here he was after World War II bald, moustached and spectacled, smoking the same old pipe and energetic as ever. The swan, he admitted, was one of his masterpieces. He had retired from his post as museum taxidermist several years previously, the post he had held for forty years. Now he was helping a friend who was starting a shop and wanted something unusual to put in the window. This was no problem at all to the man who had made lifelike Bushmen and later preserved a coelacanth. I often wonder what happened to that lovely swan.

Drury and his swan gave me something to think about. I decided to investigate the bird that “by the dull world is ill understood”. Then I would return to my friend Drury full

of questions and learn the truth about the swans. Rather to my surprise I discovered that the first swans to reach Cape Town were black swans from Australia via the Dutch East Indies. Willem de Vlamingh was the Dutch navigator who left Table Bay at the end of the seventeenth century to explore the west coast of Australia and search for a missing ship. De Vlamingh reported “a barren, bare, desolate region with few fires and black naked men”. Only in a river did he encounter any remarkable animals; these were black swans, four of which he brought back alive. All four died soon after he reached Batavia. More specimens of this incredible bird were captured in the estuary named Swan River by De Vlamingh; but people in Europe decided they were a myth, fabulous

creatures like the blue boar or the red lion seen on inn signs. Valentyn, the Dutch clergyman who visited the Cape late in the seventeenth century, went on to Batavia and published the first accurate description of the black swan. He saw two living specimens. A plate in Valentyn’s book of travel showed a Dutch ship in the Swan River with her boats capturing swans. This aroused the interest of naturalists in England; yet a century passed before the Dutch were able to deliver live specimens in Europe.

Ships with black swans on board called at Table Bay, of course, and a wealthy Constantia farmer named H. O. Eksteen purchased one or more of them. Thus people in the Cape were able to stare at a bird previously regarded as an impossibility. It measured forty inches from beak to

tail and weighed fourteen pounds. Only the primary and secondary wing feathers were white; the tips of some body feathers were brown; the rest of the feathers and the feet were black. Scarlet eyes and bill formed a contrast. No longer were cynical people able to say: "An honest lawyer, a black swan." Unfortunately Eksteen lost his black swan. It strayed from Bergvleit and Eksteen advertised his loss in the "Cape Town Gazette" on October 25, 1817, and offered a reward. There the story of Cape Town's first swan ends for I was unable to discover whether Eksteen found his valuable pet. It is clear, however, that the black swan appeared in Cape Town several years before the first specimens reached England. "Notes and Queries," the English historical journal, puts the

date at about 1820 and says that black swans were being bred in England in the eighteen-thirties. These dramatic birds have done more to advertise Australia than the kangaroo. At one time they were shot for food and trapped for swansdown and feathers, so that the black swan was in danger of extinction. Now they are protected. A number of black swans have been domesticated in South Africa since Eksteen's day and their light-coloured cygnets are seen with them. In flight they utter a high-pitched mellow honk and this is also heard at night. Four black swans were placed in the duck pond at Queen's Park Zoo, East London, a few years ago. I have been unable to trace the first mute white swans to reach South Africa. De Beers imported mute swans for the lake at Somerset West dynamite

factory just before the end of last century; but these were not the first. There is also a mysterious colony of wild mute swans, *Cygnus olor*, in the Humansdorp district; a strange colony of unknown origin, the only foreign birds in the Cape to be protected by special proclamation. I shall give the various theories for the presence of this colony later.

My friend Drury told me that the swan in the window had been found dead near the river mouth at Milnerton and brought to his home at Melkbosch Strand by a kindly motorist. Drury had a private museum there and all sorts of unexpected specimens arrived at his door. I sat with the erudite taxidermist in his seaside workshop and listened to his views on swans. He worked as he talked, filling in a

wooden framework with shavings before covering the “manikin” with clay and sewing the skin of a penguin over the clay to resemble the living bird. “There’s a lot of bluff in this business,” remarked Drury. “Even the beautiful swan is not what it seems.”

Mute white swans, declared Drury, could be extremely dangerous, especially at nesting time. They were fiery, treacherous as snakes, ferocious as savages. He said that swans had drowned young children by holding them under water; they had attacked men and broken their limbs. Dogs were easy victims. When swan meets swan there is a fight to the death. This usually happened when a cob, the head of a family, found its mate (known as the pen) and home menaced by another cob. Massive

wings come into play with great swooshing noises. Necks are twined round each other, seeking deadly leverage. The water is littered with curly feathers. A swan that goes down in that conflict is drowned. When black and white swans meet there is a battle royal, a lake becomes a cauldron shot with blood, sharp beaks maiming the throats of enemies. But the females love these encounters, swimming round the hissing contestants with outstretched necks in obvious delight.

I asked Drury whether the mute swan was really mute. He shook his head vigorously. They had a trumpet call, an alarm call, a honk of indignation and they snorted a warning when anyone came too close to the nest. And the death-song of folklore and fable? The swan song that has

inspired writers and poets since Socrates, the first and last musical strain bursting forth with a richness and power unknown before?

*The silver swan who, living had
no note,
When death approached, unlocked
her throat
Leaning her breast upon the reedy
shore
Sang her first and last, and sang
no more.*

Drury said it was a pleasing myth. Probably he was right, though in recent years several leading naturalists have said that there may be a grain of truth in the legend. One observer claimed to have heard the swan song. The swan had been mortally wounded in the air and it came gliding slowly to the water and began its death song; plaintive and

musical, like the slow running of an octave. Gunners who have wounded swans have spoken of the clear notes they heard.

Shakespeare referred to the swan song in his “Rape of Lucrece” :

*And now this pale swan in her
watery nest
Begins the sad dirge of her
certain ending.*

There are other poetical references to the mute swan that did “chant sweet strains with his dying tongue”. Coleridge brought the legend into a sardonic verse:

*Swans sing before they die; 'twere
no bad thing
Did certain persons die before
they sing.*

Mute swans pair once only and are said to be faithful unto death. Thus a

pair may live together for almost half a century, returning to the same nesting area every year, building a fresh nest of moss and turf close to the old one. Drury said he had heard of a swan still building a nest on the old site and waiting patiently for the dead mate to return.

South Africa's only colony of wild swans has suffered from poaching but the raiders were believed to have sold the birds on account of their high value. It appears that the first pair of wild swans was reported by a native labourer on the farm Grasmere five miles south of Humansdorp. He had never seen anything like these large white birds before; so he and the farmer hurried to the dam where the swans had settled. They fed the birds regularly, captured and pinioned them. (The end joints of the

wings were severed so that they were unable to fly.) The female laid clutches of eggs, eight to a dozen a year; and Mr. Meyer, the owner, gave away pairs to other farmers in the district. Some fully-grown birds migrated to the Kromme River estuary and there are now scores of them in the area. Otters and rats, hawks, eels and turtles are their enemies.

Dr Douglas Hey, Dr D. F. Kokot and other scientists have made determined efforts over a number of years to trace the origin of the Kromme River swans. Dr Hey was informed that the original pair were a gift from the British royal family to a farmer who had entertained them during their South African tour. (Mute swans on the Thames are owned by the Crown and cygnets are rounded

up every year by the swan master and marked.) It was said that the first pair bore the royal insignia on their bills; but Dr Hey was unable to confirm this story. Dr Kokot fixed the date of the arrival of the swans on Meyer's farm; they came at the time of the 1918 influenza epidemic. Some said they had escaped from a ship that was wrecked near Port Elizabeth; but I have searched the records in vain for a wreck at that period. Others declared that the swans had escaped from a crate on the deck of a ship passing Cape St. Francis. Dr Kokot also investigated a report that the swans had been brought from England by a Member of Parliament. In fact, two black swans were brought back from Australia by a Parliamentary delegation in 1920 and placed on a Graaff-

Reinet farm. They disappeared seven years later and were never traced. So the mystery remains unsolved.

Mr H. E. Newdigate placed a pair of Kromme River swans on the Piesang River at Plettenburg Bay during the nineteen fifties and allowed them to fly freely. An otter killed the pen. The local authorities then imported two royal swans from England. (The freight was £90.) Both were pinioned. An otter killed one. When the survivor was placed with the original cob they fought like demons. One was driven into the bush and was killed by an otter. The last of these ill-fated swans lived alone for about five years and then vanished. Swans are expensive decorations in South Africa and you never know what will happen to them; nevertheless they have been coming in more

freely in recent years to adorn lakes and nature reserves. Naturalists believe that swans help to clear certain waters choked by weed. The effects of the increase and spread of swans on local waterfowl and farming interests, however, have still to be determined. In semi-arid areas waterfowl are none too plentiful; the birds have many enemies; safe places for nesting and rearing the young are hard to find. Thus the swans might compete with indigenous wildfowl to the extent of becoming a threat. Mute swans like islands in swamps. Pairs defend their breeding areas vigorously. However, many scientists regard the swan as vicious towards other birds only in semi-artificial conditions. Swans living in the wild state have been cleared of the charges against them. Water weeds, stalks,

roots and buds of aquatic plants make up the swan's normal diet. They seldom damage the farmer's crops. Anglers have suggested that swans destroy fish eggs on a large scale but this has not been proved.

I have a theory of my own about the origin of the Kromme River swans. Swans are migratory birds. They can fly by day and by night; a full-grown cob may have a nine-foot wingspan and a speed of fifty or sixty miles an hour. Mute they may be, but in flight the wing-music is impressive as their pinions beat the air in throbbing rhythm. Half a century ago, I think, a pair of swans set out from the lake at Somerset West and found a new home in the Kromme River estuary. There the feral colony arose in ideal conditions; a wide estuary where mud prawns, worms and other creatures

supplied the swans with a change of diet. There and on the Seekoei river, on Groenvlei and other waters along the Garden Route their descendants flourish. Long live the swans!

Two swans flew from the Somerset West lake to the Milnerton lagoon a few years before World War II. They were captured and returned to the lake, but they preferred the lagoon and soon re-appeared there. Cygnets were hatched at Milnerton and the family was regarded as the property of Milnerton Estates. Two swans, possibly from Milnerton, were often seen near the Adderley Street pier at this period.

You do not have to be a King Ludwig of Bavaria (the mad king who had a mania for swans and built the huge Neuschwanstein castle) to admire the majestic beauty of the swans. They

come down to us with a thousand years and more of folklore and poetry. You feel their presence in the music of Sibelius; you see them in Tchaikovsky's ballet; you read of them in the classic fairy tales. Swans are the birds of poets' dreams, the wild swans of songs and romance. They have indeed a wide appeal, these dazzling white beauties. One of Cape Town's first taverns was called "De Witte Swaen" and you do not have to go far in England to find a "White Swan Inn". No wonder dear old James Drury halted and held me with his masterpiece in the window.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE EAST IN OUR MIDST

AL-LAH! Haya il' al' Allah! It started far away on the other side of the world, the call of the muezzin, and it has reached the southern tip of South Africa at the speed of the westering sun. Moslems in all the eastern lands have heard it; they have seen the flags running up on minarets in Burma and India; and as the dying sun touches the Blue Mosque in Cairo thousands bow down towards Mecca.

Allah! The cry comes south through Zanzibar to Cape Town and now the muezzin is chanting the evening prayer as the Malays of this isolated colony have done for three centuries. Here is the East in our midst with the language, the music and the magic of

the Malay archipelago. Here are the people, light brown and handsome, with pleasant voices and courteous manners. Here is the aroma of their traditional foods; their homes are redolent with *masala* and *klappertert*. All through the quarter you hear their benedictions. *Salam Alaikoem! Walai-koenz salam!*

Some of the Malays came to the Cape in chains, others were soldiers or servants. Later there arrived Javanese chiefs who had conspired to overthrow the Dutch; leaders who had planned to slaughter every Christian in the islands. Priests came, too, including that great miracle worker Sheik Joseph of Macassar, a man of royal blood. When his ship ran out of fresh water and all on board were facing death in mid-ocean the sheik dipped his foot in the

sea and ordered the crew to lower casks. *Allah!* The sea water had become fresh. So runs the legend and the *kramat* built in his honour at Faure is the holiest of the five Malay shrines in the Cape Peninsula. The most isolated *kramat* stands on Robben Island, built with the aid of the prison staff to commemorate Tuan Abdul Rahmen Matara.

Of course the Malay language has almost died out in Cape Town though a number of Malay words have been embodied in Afrikaans. For example the word *baie* (*many*) is believed to have been derived from the Malay *banja*. Cape Malays still use certain Malay phrases, such as *salamat djalan* (a good journey to you) and *salamat tinggal* (may you rest content). Arabic is the language of the Koran, but not all the worship-

pers understand the words read out by the priest. However, the Koran was translated into Afrikaans a decade ago.

Only during the past century or so have the Malays been able to gather in their mosques. Under the Dutch rule people of creeds other than the established church were forbidden to worship in public. Slaves and others met in rooms, stone quarries or in quiet places on Table Mountain. Thunberg, the Swedish traveller of the seventeen-seventies, attended a New Year festival (held in June) in a Malay house. Walls and floor were covered with carpets, the altar was hung with silk and bottles served as flower vases. Frankincense, the aromatic gum resin, filled the air and there were yellow wax candles. It was not until early last century, when

General Janssens was installed as governor, that the Malays were given permission to set up mosques; and this was confirmed by the British authorities soon afterwards. The early mosques were rooms in houses, like the old mosque at the Long Street palms. Now there are dozens of buildings specially designed as mosques in the Peninsula. You will find six of them between Signal Hill and Long Street. Oldest of all the city mosques is the Owal mosque at the corner of Dorp and Buitengracht streets; a plain building which has had five generations of priests from one family. Here the men kneel in rows on the red carpet facing Mecca. Only during the Feast of the Orange Leaves (in honour of the Prophet's birthday) do the women take part in the service. That is the time when the ceiling is

festooned with coloured streamers and the women sit on the carpet to shred the orange leaves and dip them in sweet oils from Saudi Arabia. After the service comes the lavish meal of spiced tea, curries and frikkadel, konfynt and cakes. John Schofield Mayson, who studied the Cape Malays in the middle of last century, said that he found one mosque. Lady Duff Gordon described a Cape Town mosque in the eighteen sixties; "a large room like a country ballroom, with glass chandeliers, carpeted and with the crescent and the royal arms of England". This was probably the Chiappini Street mosque.

Mayson, an intelligent observer, said that all the Cape Malays spoke the Malay language though very few of those he met were the children of Java-born parents. They were people

of middle height, sinewy, with small and sparkling eyes and black, silky hair. Their lozenge-shaped faces were coloured light brown to deep olive with expressive features. Many had peaked beards. They wore crimson turbans, neck scarves, gay vests, long jackets and wide trousers. That was the period of the pyramid hat, still worn by coachmen on special occasions. Their women had good figures and “were not devoid of comeliness”. They went unveiled. Fish and rice formed their main diet but butchers kept Malay priests in their employ to slaughter animals according to Malay custom. Malays worked as shopkeepers and masons, carpenters, wagoners, tailors, cobblers, seamen, boatmen and domestic servants. They were dexterous with horses and outstanding as fishermen.

Even in those days Mayson found Malays who owned houses and fruit shops; men who had saved thousands of pounds. They went on joyous picnics in gaily-painted carts; they were also fond of cockfights and cards. Only four Malays from Cape Town had made the difficult Mecca pilgrimage of those days: Samondien, Miedien, Omar and Gastordien (known as “Carel Pilgrim”). Two large Malay schools were teaching the children to read the Koran in Arabic.

About two decades later a visitor named E. G. Aspelting remarked: “No country on the face of the earth is more mixed in its inhabitants than the Cape”. He said that Dutch officials returning to Holland from Java took male and female slaves with them as far as the Cape. Some were sold at the

Cape, others were set free or sent back to the East. Prices of slaves were high at the Cape, low in the Dutch East Indies. (Mayson gave the price of a Malay slave in Cape Town at the end of the eighteenth century as between £100 and £400.) Aspeling pointed out that some free Malays attended Dutchmen of rank on visits to Europe and learnt to speak Dutch. Such men often remained at the Cape on their return and were known as Mardykens. Aspeling emphasised the fact that not all members of the Malay colony were slaves, exiles or criminals. Mardykens, it seems, were named after a village in Amboyna noted for its intelligent population. They were clever basket-makers and masons as their descendants are to this day.

One-fifth of Cape Town's population were Malays a century ago and thus they were more conspicuous than they are today. Men wore red cotton handkerchiefs on their heads and long "hip" waistcoats. Only the boys wore the Stamboul fez. The women, neat and modest, came out on holidays in the rich silks and satins they still carry so well. Gold pins and gold earrings were their favourite ornaments. Both sexes wore the wooden sandals called *kaparrings*; but the women put on white satin shoes at weddings.

Hadji Manan and his wife Edna, their daughter and her cousin Yakoof Manan, were sent from Cape Town to London in the eighties of last century to demonstrate wicker and basketwork at a colonial exhibition. Queen Victoria and the Prince of

Wales admired their work and invited them to Windsor Castle. A reporter described the girl as “the Mrs. Langtry of her race” with her fine teeth and eyes. Queen Victoria was interested in Yakoof’s *kaparri-rigs*, so he made her a pair and sent them with his “profound obeisance”. Mrs Hadji Edna Mana died shortly before World War II, having passed the century mark.

In the Cape Town of nearly a hundred years ago another well-known Malay personality was Jan van Batavia, a priest, who arrived before the Dutch rule ended. He fought in the Malay Corps at the Battle of Blaauwberg and was wounded. Jan van Batavia became a centenarian. Most famous of the Malays of our own times was Dr Abdullah Abdurahman, a grandson

of slaves who was the first Cape Malay to qualify in medicine. His son-in-law, Dr Abdul Hamid Gool, also became a great personality, and not only in the Malay Quarter. The Gools lived in Buitensingel at the top of Long Street, once on the outskirts of the town. There the doctor’s mother tended a garden filled with medicinal herbs, buchu and other remedies. When I first called there to interview Dr Goof he was still going on his rounds with a horse and trap.

No one knows why the Malays chose Bo-Kaap on the mountain slopes as their own quarter. It appears to have been a slow process. Many of the flat-roofed houses with fanlights and double-sash windows were there in the eighteenth century, occupied by white artisans. Soldiers of several nations, stationed at the Cape in the

seventeen-eighties, caused a housing shortage and so the Bo-Kaap settlement grew. These humble homes had great charm, with their courtyards, vines and pomegranates. Only in the Malay Quarter is it possible to visualise the Cape Town of the late eighteenth century; not just a surviving house but a whole street. When you glance into a cobbled steeg filled with washing you move back two centuries. An architect with a proper respect for these relics once declared: "It is as important for Cape Town to keep the Malay Quarter as it is for Athens to see that the Parthenon still stands." This is a world of robed priests and children playing a *aljanderspelletjie* or riding in their soap-boxes; of stoeps with end seats where the old people rest and gaze out over Table Bay thinking of the

storms and the enormous hauls of fish long ago. The hammers of the barrow-makers are still heard where once such craftsmen as Frans Hillegers the silversmith tapped out splendid works of art. There is a workshop where members of a family make six thousand fezzes a year. The flaming scarlet fez is in great demand, but some Moslems prefer maroon, others black. They talk of a *kofija* rather than fez and order the style they favour; tall or flat. After the pilgrimage a *hadji* wears a black tassel. In this oriental world you also find the Malay tailors; sons and grandsons of craftsmen who made black jackets, striped trousers and frock coats for uncomfortable clients of the Victorian era. Their ancestors worked by hand, taking a fortnight to make a blue

serge suit; price four pounds complete.

Signal Hill supplied the clay for the sun-dried bricks used in the Malay Quarter during the early days. Plaster and lime wash gave the walls a patina equal to a fine piece of furniture. Whale oil and molasses kept out the rain. Street after street drops down the hillside like the little homes of Madeira or Genoa or Gibraltar. It is still possible to discover elegant facades and handsome old parapets masking the flat roofs. Atmosphere, that elusive quality, is stronger here among the chickens and pigeons of the Malay Quarter than in any other corner of South Africa.

It is not only the aromas of the Malay Quarter that create this atmosphere, the tang of a pumpkin *bredie*

or a ravishing gestoofde snoek. There are also the sounds and above all the music. When a Malay choir is on the march with a *ghomma* liedjie you can see the *Alabama* entering Table Bay or go further back to the freeing of the slaves. When the guitars are heard you may think of the far off days when Malay exiles at the Cape sent to Java for coconut shells and made their traditional stringed instrument the *ra'king*. Some were made of teak inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The *ra'king* had four strings. It was still being played in the quarter between the wars but now the guitar reigns supreme and the romantic eastern *ra'king* has become a museum piece. The drum or *ghomma* used by the Malays is clearly of oriental origin; a little cask with a skin nailed over one end, held under the left arm and

struck with the palms of both hands. Professor P. R. Kirby, that great South African musical research worker, investigated the *ghomma* but was baffled by the name. He found that a similar drum in India was called a *dhol* and thought that the mysterious *ghomma* might possibly have been derived from the African *ngoma*.

Malay choirs were formed in the days when slaves had to be in their homes after nine at night. Professor I. D. du Plessis, poet, linguist and leading authority on the Cape Malays, found strange oriental legends, animal stories and folklore in their songs. Fragments came from the East; but the Malays, hungry for new material, seized upon old Dutch songs and continued singing them long after they had been forgotten

and lost in Holland. Pamphlets containing Dutch songs were printed in Amsterdam early last century and sold in Cape Town; the Malays have also preserved these songs in their enormous repertoires. The leader of a choir sings the melody while his followers join in with the end-phrases and chorus. At a picnic the Malays form a circle, link hands and move round while a Dutch song is sung. Of course there are also many songs of local origin in Afrikaans. Dr du Plessis was once surprised to find a Malay choir singing a student song in Latin. However, they are not wedded to a medieval Dutch past; their *moppies* or humorous (and sometimes Rabelaisian) songs are often almost meaningless yet topical. The words may look silly in print but the choir brings the most absurd verse

to life and has the audience rolling on the pavement. For example:

*Kyk hoe lyk die mense op 'n
Nuwejaar,
Die Nuwejaar, dis deurmekaar –
Ons gaan calypso dans
Dan gaan ons bop.*

Organised choirs of Malays have been traced back to the Malay fire-brigade I have already mentioned. Malays were singing ballads in the streets three centuries ago; but the *pomplompies* of last century formed the first uniformed, disciplined choir and a few songs mention them and their achievements. The modern choirs are as smart as a military parade; every man flawlessly appparelled in the selected clothes; always fezzes, usually blazers with braid or well-cut jackets and sharply-pressed flannel trousers or possibly

jerseys with the emblem of the choir. No coon nonsense in these outfits. They call themselves Jonge Sentrales or Royal Coronations or Red Roses; they are as full of the personality of Cape Town as the bay, the mountain and the south-easter. Some say the choirs are like the old Volendam fishermen singers; but I think these Malays are truly unique. They are the Morning Stars and Tulips, the Gladioli. Their art is their own. Their music opens wide the doors of Old Cape Town so that you see the torchlight processions of long ago.

Powers white people never had - or lost thousands of years ago - are still attributed to the Cape Malays. The stories are greatly exaggerated and it is probable that the legacy of magic (or oriental trickery) is fast dying out. Nevertheless there is a strange

residuum which is hard to explain. Anyone who has watched a Khalifa performance must have gone away mystified and the Khalifa is only part of what has come to be known in Cape Town as “Malay magic”.

Local legends are as old as Sheik Joseph, the priest who made sea water drinkable. Mayson, an accurate recorder, described the flogging of a Malay for some minor offence. A priest stood beside the man and urged him: “Be steadfast! Only believe and you will escape the pain.” The whip fell and the man remained unhurt. Mayson said that charms were in common use. A priest was convicted in the middle of last century for selling charms which were supposed to give criminals immunity from detection. Mayson also heard of poisons administered by Malays,

poisons so subtle that death might be delayed for weeks.

Our old friend Joseph de Lima was among those who gave an early description of a Khalifa display. He searched for an origin and was informed that it was designed to celebrate the birthday festival of Seida Abubeker, the successor of Mahomet. Priests then denied that the performance had any religious meaning and this is the view expressed today. Khalifa displays gripped the Malays to such an extent in the middle of last century that other citizens in the neighbourhood could not sleep. Every night the drums and tambourines were heard in the town and the performances seemed endless. Mr P. E. de Roubaix, J.P., was deputed to deal with the matter and leading Malays offered him a

solid silver inkstand in the hope of gaining his support. He declined to accept the gift and warned them that the police would be called in if the Khalifa disturbed people in future. The Malays then petitioned Governor Sir George Grey, stating that they had enjoyed the privilege of celebrating the Khalifa for a number of years.

Hadji Magiedien, a priest educated in Mecca, agreed that the performances had brought the Moslem religion into disrepute. He suggested that one day a year should be set aside for the Khalifa. Another priest, Abdol Waab, in charge of the congregation that built the Chiappini Street mosque, declared: "The playing of the Khalifa is not compulsory on the Malays. They can do it of their own free will and do not commit any sin

by doing it." A newspaper remarked bitterly: "The interminable thrum-thrumming which forms part of the play and the bawling of the performers are a disgrace and a nuisance." Mr de Roubaix found a solution by limiting the performances and the Sultan of Turkey (then the spiritual head of the Cape Malays) sent him a gold snuffbox set with diamonds. Soon afterwards a special command performance was organised for Prince Alfred and a spectator commented: "His Royal Highness appeared much pleased. The feats were highly amusing, astonishing and not altogether unmingled with fear of accident. The daring and neatness of trickery might vie with the most expert Indian magic."

It is clear from detailed accounts of the Khalifa a century ago that the

performances were more sensational than any seen nowadays. Mr Justice A. W. Cole watched a performance in which red-hot chains were handled without the flesh being burnt. The room was lit with candles in silver sconces and garlands of flowers hung on the walls. Perfume was burning. Four young Malays marched round the room grunting in chorus as though they were in severe pain. Other Malays squatted on mats. Then the young men shouted, threw themselves about and stripped off their shirts. A boy entered the room and the young men seized him, plunged a sharp instrument like a meat skewer through his tongue and led him round the spectators. One of the performers plunged a dagger into the fleshy part of his own side and left the dagger there. Another performer

skewered his cheek. Modern displays which I witnessed were similar to those of last century, but much of the time was occupied by men who sliced their arms with swords without drawing blood. In some performances the eyelids were pierced and men rushed on to sword blades. Devotees had one explanation, only - faith in Allah!

Mr Frank Worthington reported another version of the Khalifa, seen in Cape Town many years ago. He paid ten pounds. A spike with a rounded wooden head was supplied by a priest. The performer placed his head on the edge of the platform, put the spike in his mouth and held it upright. The priest then hit the wooden head three times with a mallet, so that the performer was pinned through the cheek to the

boards. The audience of Malays roared with admiration. The priest then loosened the spike and the man sauntered through the audience, the spike protruding from his cheek but without a drop of blood appearing. Dunk, dunk, dunk went the drums.

White surgeons are unable to produce these weird effects and would not do so if they knew the secret. However, they realise that there is a rational explanation. Some parts of the body are less sensitive than others. It is thought that certain ascetics are able by long training of mind and body to produce auto-anaesthesia, insensibility to pain. Incisions made by skewers heal but remain open so that the apertures may be used again and again at each performance without bleeding. There was once a *dukun* in Cape Town who

put on a revolting show in which he was able to move one eye far out of the socket and replace it without damage. It is also possible that stupefying drugs are used in some tricks. A more pleasing entertainment was given by a *dukun* who mixed three curry powders of different colours in a bowl of water and swallowed the blend. On request he would then blow dry curry powder of any of the three colours out of his mouth.

The kris (or creese), a dagger either straight or curved and elaborately decorated, plays a large part in Malay magic. "A good kris, a good wife, a good house" used to be the Malay's prayer. Fine specimens of the kris, possibly centuries old, are treasured by Cape Malays. A kris with a long straight blade was used for the

execution of criminals and this type often had a handle of ebony covered with flowered gold. I have heard of a Malay *dukun* in Cape Town who was said to have been able to draw water from a kris, watched by an audience of Europeans. Probably this was a case of collective hallucination. The *dukun* held the kris point down and moved his fingers up and down the blade until drops of water fell to the point. Before long the water became a trickle and filled a cup. This *dukun* handed the kris round the audience; it was so hard that no one could bend it. In the hands of the *dukun*, however, the blade became flexible. He worked with bare arms and baffled everyone present. The *dukun* was also credited with the ability to bring a kris to life, making it rise from a table, fly like an arrow to his chest and return without

causing harm. Then the kris wriggled like a snake and ejected blood from the point. "You have seen a tortured soul searching for a resting place," announced the *dukun*. The show had a devastating effect on the audience and one man fainted.

It is said that a *dukun* can question a sleeping person and secure truthful answers. White people have called in a *dukun* to cleanse a place of an evil influence. Dr I D. du Plessis recorded an amusing example of Malay trickery when a *dukun* buried eggshells with magic words under the wicket before a cricket match to ensure victory for the team of his choice. Certainly some queer beliefs, medicine, drugs and powers came to the Cape with the Malays centuries ago. Magic of the evil sort is condemned by devout Moslems.

Harmless love potions are still to be had at various prices, all equally ineffective. And the mysterious Khalifa goes on triumphantly from year to year. Al-lah! Dunk, dunk, dunk, DUNK!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN
LUXURY SHOP

*You showed me nutmeg and nutmeg
husks,
Ostrich feathers and elephant tusks,
Hundreds of tons of costly tea,
Packed in wood by the Cingalee.*

JOHN MASEFIELD

BETWEEN the wars there was a corner shop in Plein Street selling all sorts of culinary herbs and spices and rare foodstuffs. Vincenzo Franconi, chef in charge of the parliamentary kitchen, took me over there one afternoon and introduced me to George Henderson, the proprietor. Henderson called his place "The Luxury Shop". To my regret it did not last very long; there were not so many foreigners in Cape Town at that time and the market for caviar

and foie gras, birds' nests and truffles was not what it is today.

Henderson told us that he had spent some years in Malaya as a rubber planter and had become interested in the eastern condiments and cuisine; hence this rather ambitious enterprise. He was a romantic, I thought, gripped by the fascination of aromatic seeds, barks and powerful roots; those tropical flavourings that opened up some of the great trade routes of the world. "Light in weight but heavy with adventure," Henderson remarked, glancing round the decorated jars and canisters on his shelves. "The art of using these herbs and spices is as old as fire. This merchandise defies analysis and it works on the stomach in ways unknown to medical science."

Henderson reminded us that Cape Town was founded and the settlement flourished because of the spice trade. Holland's wealth flowed round the Cape in the shape of cloves from Amboina, cinnamon from Ceylon and the hot red capsicums of Japan. He recalled the great days early last century when Jacob Cloete of Constantia exchanged his magnificent wines for tamarinds and the vanished fish condiment known as *trassie*; sweet wine for nutmeg and preserved bamboo. There was a time, said Henderson, when you could have had a sheep for a pound of ginger; when peppercorns were called "grains of paradise" and counted out berry by berry. Those were the days when spices were used as preservatives. Ice and modern refrigeration cut deep into the ancient trade in pickled

meats, just as modern medicine put most of the herbalists out of business. Henderson clearly saw himself as a man planning a revival in the exotic treasures brought to the Cape in the Dutch East Indiamen of centuries ago.

However, there were other expensive items in Henderson's storeroom. Leaving his wife at the counter he led Franconi and me into a fragrant loft over the shop; a place stacked high with canvas sacks and woven bales, cases of Chinese mushrooms and bamboo shoots, rose-petal jam, pomegranate syrup and other delicacies hitherto unknown to Plein Street shoppers. Henderson had French sardines of a brand I had never seen before, let alone tasted; vintage sardines bearing the Rodel mark; slim and elegant sardines packed in olive oil from Provence. Franconi's eyes

glittered when he saw those sardines. "Finest tinned food ever sold," Franconi commented. "Fried in olive oil as soon as they are landed - wonderful sardines." He was also greatly impressed by Henderson's caviar; those sturgeon's eggs were the size of buckshot and they tasted dry and creamy without the fishy flavour one might expect. It was Beluga he gave us, from a hermetically-sealed glass jar bearing the Russian eagles. After that memorable sample we declined the foie gras he offered, taking the excellence of this Perigord goose liver for granted. Franconi said he could make a marvellous Tournedos Rossini with that foie gras but, of course, it would have to be for a very special occasion. "Food of the gods," said Henderson proudly. "Garnish

with jelly and take a glass of champagne with it."

No wonder he called it "The Luxury Shop". We inspected potted grouse and partridge, rillettes of pork from Touraine, smoked salmon, marinated bear meat and octopus soup. Henderson was a pioneer indeed in this rich field. He was years before his time when he imported tinned Bourgogne snails, cabbage palm and the sugar plums made by Portuguese nuns; those luscious blue plums covered with powdered sugar. Nearly all Henderson's delicacies were imported: Italian macaroons, maple syrup from Vermont, tea with the Darjeeling muscat flavour, table waters from Vichy and Evian and the German Appolinaris with its mineral flavour. Nevertheless, the erudite George Henderson was voluble in

praise of one South African delicacy that he produced, truffles from the Kalahari.

“These thumb-sized, wrinkled little fungi from the Gordonia district are as good as the truffles that Madame de Pompadour fed to Louis XV,” claimed Henderson. “I get them from a farmer who employs a Bushman - the Bushman’s dog finds the cracks in the red earth and smells them out. A great mystery is the truffle. You can’t grow it, like the mushroom. It has a pungent aroma, so that you would imagine that it would not blend with anything else. Yet truffles are superb in combination with other foods. They turn the homely scrambled egg into a dish for a banquet.”

Franconi nodded. “It is indeed a mystery,” he agreed. “I have been

told by members of parliament that truffles grow near acacias in the desert. They are all sizes, from peas to oranges. All delicious, all indigestible, all hard to get hold of. But give me truffles and I will prepare a roast pullet or young turkey that will remind you of one of Escoffier’s masterpieces. Or you can sprinkle a *tagliatelle* or *risotto* with thin slices of truffles and you will understand why these peculiar things are called ‘the diamonds of the kitchen’.”

Mention of *risotto* reminded Henderson that he had several varieties of rice in stock, a number of curry powders, chutneys, Bombay ducks and the savoury wafer biscuits called puppadums. The long thin Patna rice was the finest obtainable declared Henderson, but he also had Carolina rice. Then he turned to Franconi with

all due deference and asked the chef for his views on curry.

“You can never go wrong in South Africa if you put a good curry and rice on the menu at lunch-time,” Franconi declared. “Not too hot - just strong enough to arouse an appetite. I like to start it early - chicken or lamb. Curry is really a thick stew with onions, sliced apple, tomato, chutney and stock. And, of course, the curry powder. When I was in Durban I bought my own spices at the Indian market and I used a ‘curry stone’ to grind each item separately. You lose something when the powder is kept in a tin. What did I put in? Green ginger, coriander and cumin seeds, onions and chilli, peppercorns and turmeric, cloves of garlic, butter, coconut and lime. That’s one way. You can add carda-

mon and mustard. Poppy seeds are found in many curries. Bay leaf is also known as curry leaf, it is used so often. Some chefs dry raw slices of mango in the sun and grind them to powder. The secret lies in long, slow cooking. You can use any meat, fish or vegetable but I prefer a prawn curry, eaten with a dessert spoon and fork.”

I felt that I had heard the last word on curry from the lips of an authority. Henderson, however, was a curry enthusiast and he carried on the conversation. He spoke wistfully of mulligatawny soup made by a master chef in Singapore; currypuffs or *samoosas* at bygone cocktail parties; and princely arrays of side-dishes that included sliced bananas, red and green chillies, diced cucumber, curried lentils and pickles.

Henderson opened a jar of *masala* paste and the East came rushing up to us. Henderson closed the jar. "You can have too much curry, of course," he declared. "Spoils the palate for other dishes if you have it every day. Indians never get tired of it but I do."

Mustard is one of the condiments I cannot do without and I asked Henderson whether he had anything interesting in that line. "They grew it near Cape Town last century," remarked the well-informed Henderson, much to my surprise. "Yes, there was a farmer named Blignaut at Agter Paarl back in the eighties who won a prize for his mustard at the Paarl Show." Henderson had Dijon mustard prepared with white wine; Dusseldorf mustard in ceramic pots; and a hot blend of brown and white

mustard, old as the Bible, from the farms of Norfolk. But nothing from Paarl. The mustard world is full of trade secrets, handed down for centuries. "Sprinkle your steaks and chops with mustard before grilling," advised Franconi.

At my request we examined the stock of herbs and spices carefully. Franconi was deeply interested for the Italians are herb cooks by tradition and in spite of his years of experience he was still willing to learn something. Henderson showed us lovely aromatic basil, one of the finest herbs in any garden; and Franconi told us that he used a pinch with tomato dishes and *zucchini*. We gazed upon the fern-like leaves of chervil, the French alternative to parsley. ("Good in potato salad" Franconi commented.) The seeds and

dried leaves of dill, I learnt, were for fish sauces. Marjoram was Franconi's favourite for sprinkling over roast joints. So great was the flavour, he said, that you could spread marjoram leaves on brown-bread sandwiches. Mint was there in various forms, one of the most widely used herbs in the world; the sweet scent arose like a refreshing breeze. "What would lamb and green peas be without mint?" inquired Henderson. "Mint tea for indigestion," added Franconi. Rosemary also aroused the chef's enthusiasm. "But you must be so careful with it," he warned us. "The oil from those flowers and leaves can spoil the taste of any meat."

Henderson's sage was overpowering, with a musty smell. Yet this is a healthy flavouring, not only for

stuffing but also for pork dishes. Franconi said tarragon was essential in the kitchen; he needed it for Sauce Bearnaise and Sauce Tartare and for French dressing. It had just a trace of the liquorice flavour. Thyme was in that class, too, an enchanted herb, essence of the French cuisine. "No wonder the bees love it," remarked Henderson. "Bay leaf and thyme for soups and stews. And the monks could not make their Benedictine liqueur without it."

Franconi approved of savory seeds; specks of savoury in a salad; peppery but excellent when used with restraint. Fennel, a bundle of fennel stalks, held our attention while Franconi spoke of the aniseed flavour and the value of fennel in cooking fish. Dutch settlers brought fennel to the Cape long ago and they

scoured the wine vats with it. Unfortunately it affected the taste of the wine. Fennel is for sausages, pickles and sauces. It cures flatulence and some optimists think it makes fat people lean. "We are still in debt to the ancient herbalists," Henderson declared. "Fennel may not restore the eyesight. Sesame will not cure ear noises as the old doctors believed. Yet synthetic medicine has not yet conquered the vegetable kingdom. Garlic remains a great remedy for coughs and colds and asthma. It is the secret of good health."

I lingered over the saffron jar and Franconi nodded sympathetically. "A railway chef, even a parliamentary chef, dare not use much of that stuff," he remarked sadly. "It gives a colour and flavour such as no other

flower will provide - and it is the most expensive item on the whole list." Henderson agreed. "Half a million dried stamens of the saffron crocus are needed to make one kilo of saffron powder," he pointed out. "But I much prefer the actual pistils - these red filaments with their wonderful aroma in cooking. Saffron costs so much that you find imitations, forgeries on the market. It is almost as precious as gold dust."

"Paella, spaghetti Milanaise, saffron cake," murmured Franconi in ecstasy.

"Tastes bitter, like iodine," said Henderson. "Yet the rich orange colour and the delicate flavour when used by an expert reveal the virtues of this ancient discovery." Turmeric came as an anti-climax, the dried aromatic root ground to a brilliant

yellow powder and known in South Africa as *borrie*. Some say it is a tonic, a diuretic an anti-scorbutic. Certainly the Cape kitchen would fare badly without the spice that gives a mellow fragrance to rice; the spice that gives colour to curry powder, chutneys and pickles. When *borrie* enters your nostrils you see the whole kaleidoscope of the Cape.

Nevertheless, *borrie* is not one of the most important spices. Henderson placed pepper at the top of the list, the universal spice, the main cargo at one time on board many Dutch vessels sailing round the Cape. Once a form of wealth, it remains the master spice demanded by mankind. Black and white pepper come from the same vine but the black peppercorns are picked before they are fully ripe and are more pungent.

The white is in far greater demand; but the epicure prefers black pepper fresh from the mill. Henderson spoke with expert knowledge of Java Muntok or Singapore Muntok peppers, of black Lampong and Tollicherry. He mentioned the paprika (from a sweet red pepper) that gives a goulash its typical colour and taste. He described the fiery red peppers from Mombasa and Zanzibar. Then he went on to the pimento that is used in making biltong; the dried, ground berries that also form part of many sauces and pickles.

Cinnamon lured the Portuguese round the Cape to occupy Ceylon, the cinnamon isle, early in the sixteenth century. Cinnamon took the Dutch there, too; the old spice still used in medicines; essential in the bakery trade; the bark that gave

Vasco da Gama a six thousand per cent profit at the end of one of the most successful voyages ever completed. Have you ever smelt cinnamon buns in the oven? Here is a flavour the chemists have never been able to equal. This is the most aromatic of all the spices. You can liven up a milk pudding or mince pie with cinnamon. Mix ground cinnamon with sugar and spread it on hot buttered toast. Henderson had the last word. "Stir your black coffee with a stick of cinnamon and you have the oriental touch," he advised.

Coriander comes next, neglected in some countries but not at the Cape. The aromatic seeds flavour liqueurs and confectionery; the fan-shaped leaves make a change if you are tired of parsley. They call coriander "the parsley of the East" but it has the

scent of orange peel and is stronger than parsley. All the good old Cape cookery books cry out for coriander; in *blatjang* and peach pickle, *slamse wors* and *buriyani*. Coriander goes well with all sorts of things, from gin to rice pudding.

Nutmegs came up for discussion. Henderson told us that on the spice islands he had seen birds drop to the ground, overcome by the intoxicating fumes of the nutmeg trees. "I have some Penang nutmegs here – the finest of all," he declared. "Nutmegs are always in demand." Franconi agreed heartily. I gathered that an egg flip was not complete without a sprinkling of nutmeg. Avocado soup, made with ripe avocados, chicken broth, cream, salt and pepper, also required the spicy undertone of nutmeg.

Henderson had ginger in various forms; preserved in syrup, dried ginger in Chinese chests; dark brown ginger from Sierra Leone; reddish Calicut ginger; and, of course, ground Jamaica ginger. "Once it was a rich man's spice," said Henderson: "Now it gives zest to all sorts of dishes in every sort of cuisine. Good for the stomach, too." Cloves, the most pungent of spices, made their presence known as soon as Henderson removed a lid. "Here are the unopened buds of the most beautiful, the most elegant, the most precious of all the world's trees," he chanted with a smile. Only when the Cape sea route was discovered did this great spice reach England. Cloves fetched fantastic prices in those days; they were credited with miraculous healing properties. Now

they are so cheap we can stick them in baked hams, cook them with apples or taste them during a visit to the dentist.

Henderson gave us a glimpse of borage leaves. "Borage tastes like cucumber and goes well chopped up in cream cheese – or a claret cup," he said. "You must have borage in a gin sling." Caraway seeds, he went on, were useful in disguising rank flavours; and, of course, they were essential in rye bread and certain cheeses. Fenugreek, a dried seed, gave curry its typical aroma. Cardomom seeds, strong and cool like eucalyptus, had to be used in moderation. "Orientals call them 'seeds of paradise'," Henderson declared. "You can put them in coffee for an unusual flavour - or pea

soup.” Franconi said the aroma of Danish pastry was cardomom.

“Do you keep such a simple herb as parsley?” I asked Henderson.

“Certainly not. Parsley must be fresh – otherwise you lose the iron and vitamin content. Some people smother their food with it but that is a mistake. It has a high medicinal value, it is rich in Vitamin C and acts on the kidneys as a tonic.”

“Parsley sauce for boiled fish – I must have parsley,” commented Franconi. “I put parsley first among the herbs.”

By now we had almost run through the whole gamut of Henderson’s stock and a jar of horse-radish rounded off the discussion. This piquant root brought from Franconi a recipe I have used ever since that day

with great satisfaction. “Most people just mix the powdered horse-radish with water,” Franconi remarked. “Mix it with cream, wait fifteen minutes and thin it out with vinegar – then you have a chef’s sauce.”

Yes, I was sorry when Henderson had to shut up “The Luxury Shop”. He brought a vision of Chinese junks and Phoenician galleys into Plein Street. I seemed to be watching the adventurers of many nations setting off over the horizon in search of roots and berries and bark to stimulate eager palates. They used those rich cargoes not only for cooking but for perfume, for incense, for acts of worship, for embalming kings and emperors. They burnt sweet spices to cleanse their homes after illness; they treasured rare seeds which they invested with

supernatural powers. Rome, the rich streets of Rome, reeked with costly spices. Camels plodded over the desert to Cairo loaded with pepper and cinnamon. Portuguese merchants became millionaires by the standards of their era when they broke the grip of the Moors on the overland spice trade and brought the precious cargoes round the Cape. Those were the days when nutmegs were considered worthy of silver boxes and graters, fine specimens of the silversmith's art. Peppermills were things of beauty compared with our modern cheap glass pots with bazaar salt-cellars to match.

I often wonder who moved into the "Luxury Shop" when Henderson departed. The newcomers must have breathed the lingering aromas of Henderson's cloves and nutmegs as

they filled the shelves with their less romantic merchandise.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SWEETS AND HONEY

CAPE TOWN is the home of those typical sweets known as *ou Kaapse lekkers*, the famous *tammeletjies* and the rest. Some of the makers of these sweets were as full of personality as their products were of sugar. They are still remembered; the eccentric and wealthy Miss Volsteedt (nicknamed Betje Bolletjie); and that gifted coloured woman Rachael Thompson who had her shop first in Shortmarket Street and later in Long Street.⁷

⁷ Rachael Thompson was a tiny St. Helena woman who died in 1902 during the bubonic plague epidemic. In her memoirs, “A Dinner of Herbs”, Kathleen McMagh describes the little shop, the richly-spiced air redolent with aniseed, peppermint, the elusive fragrance of

The business I recall vividly was owned by Malays, a very old house in Breë Street. The house, with its pediment and fine windows, had obviously known better days. One of the front rooms had been fitted out as a shop and this offered not only sweets but a variety of home-made jams, fruits, *atjars*, Cape sauerkraut and other pickles worthy of prizes at an agricultural show. When I first went there as a school boy I was interested only in the golden *tammeletjies* and striped *bossuikers*. Later on I bought honey and other foods with flavours not to be found elsewhere. I was also shown round the kitchen by the cook and confectioner Anna Salie.

burnt almonds lying brick-red under a spotless muslin cloth. In glass jars were brandy balls, so treacle dark as to be almost black.

Old Anna had several young assistants, for this enormous kitchen supplied not only the shop but itinerant coloured men who went round the town with bright trays of sweets. Anna and her girls could turn out anything from attractive slices of fish, fishcakes and meat rissoles to pink almond rock. I suppose that when I knew it back in the nineteen-twenties Anna's kitchen was not remarkable; but today you would find such a place only in a museum or on the old Cape farms. Antique collectors nowadays would rave over the equipment that had probably been in use there since the slave days. The kitchen was twenty feet long and almost as broad, with sash-windows letting in plenty of light. You looked into an enormous open hearth where *viervoet* pots of

burnished copper hung from chains. Over the fireplace was a grid. At one side a built-in Dutch oven had baked countless batches of *mosbolletjies*. Out of that oven came at intervals the little-known Malay dish called *soeliemama*; minced beef in balls that had been wrapped in cabbage leaves and dipped in deep fat. Anna had water laid on to a large sink but the old-fashioned teak buckets with brass hoops were still there.

Dressers and tables were solid pieces of furniture, scrubbed white. Meal bins, kneading troughs and dough boxes were in constant use. Copper candlesticks remained on the shelves in spite of the electric globes overhead. Kettles, tea-urns, a cucumber slicer and butter-barrel would all have looked well in an antique shop. I saw a brass pestle and mortar and

iron trivets for hooking on to the grate with cooking vessels. Silverware included a coffee pot, sugar basin, casserole dish, soup ladles and marrow-spoon; probably items of the old Cape silver that few people collected at that time. Anna never parted with her treasures, anyway. She had a handsome cask filled with vinegar in the kitchen. Butter was kept in a teak vat and there were brass-bound wooden tubs for salted meat. I noticed a coffee-roaster shaped like a drum with a handle. Flat irons of copper were filled with coals. Anna carried on a war against flies with sheets of gummed paper; and *gifbossies* from the Cape Flats hung from the ceiling.

Dark earthenware jars, probably of Javanese origin, held spices. In kitchen and shop were many fine

crystal jars, blue or green, holding Anna's fruit preserves. I asked Anna about some knives of unfamiliar design and she told me they were *boslemmers* from the Genadendal mission; they were really farmers' knives, useful for rough work in a kitchen. Anna's tools for sweet-making were up-to-date. She had thermometers, marble slates to cool syrups and candies, hair sieves for icing sugar, pastry brushes and moulds. Essential oils and fruit essences were set out in neat rows under the clock with a loud tick. One day the whole team would be skinning pistachio nuts in boiling water to decorate sweets and chocolates. Next time I would find them preparing the pine kernels of delicate flavour brought in by Malay boys from the Table Mountain

slopes. These kernels have a flavour entirely their own; and makers of sweets, cakes and biscuits from Cape Town to Copenhagen depend on the tiny white nuts. Sometimes they are prepared like salted almonds; or they may be fried in butter and served with drinks; or baked to a golden-brown in the oven. Anna, of course, used them by the thousand in her superb *tammeletjies*. This, I think, is the king of the Cape sweets; the most typical, the most popular. Some makers use dried peas as a substitute for the *dennepit*; not the same thing at all. The authentic *tammeletjies* are made of sugar, butter and water boiled until brown with ginger. Then the pine kernels are added with a liberal hand and the *tammeletjies* are set in the folded paper called *kadoesies* by the Malays. Leipoldt

found a recipe for a sweet rather similar to *tammeletjies* in an Italian cookery book published centuries ago; however, there were basic differences, for fruit juices were used and honey took the place of sugar.

Another great sweet made in Anna's kitchen was *lallimala*, the soft coconut ice which also contains rose water and cardamom seeds. Burnt almonds are another Cape favourite; cinnamon gives the flavour and a red pill supplies the rich colour. Brandy balls and almond rock were other varieties. I watched Anna soaking dates in sherry; then she rolled them in fine sugar and stuffed them with nuts and raisins. Her liquorice "bootlaces" were black and springy. She was also an expert with Turkish delight and acid drops shaped like fish. Cape gooseberries appeared as

decorations on her fruit and marzipan *friandises*. Her sherbet concoctions fizzed in the mouth.

Jams were made in that Breë Street kitchen during the long period when Cape Town hardly ever tasted an imported jam. Anna carried on the Cape jam-making tradition. Apricot was her best; the fruit was absurdly cheap at that time and there was no need to adulterate it with pumpkin. Factories were still importing certain fruit pulps but Anna clung to the local fruits: grapes and guavas, quince and watermelon. She also put up preserves in syrup, mebos and apricots and she made brandied peaches and grapes. Sugared plums and tomatoes appeared in her jars as well as oranges, lemons and figs. I remember especially one ambitious and pleasing effort; a bottle with

slices of pears and peaches designed to resemble flowers. Her fruit salad bottles were beautiful.

Anna was as clever with pickles as she was with sweets and jams. She could send out a keg of snoek in curry pickle as easily as a bottle of hard-boiled eggs in beetroot juice. Gherkins and onions, walnuts and peppers flowed out of Anna's kitchen according to the season. Into her *atjar* went not only the expected ingredients but also surprises such as tiny mealies and radishes. She carried every one of her scores of recipes in her head for the very good reason that she could not read or write.

Confectioners regarded honey as their basic material long before refined sugar came into the picture. Anna made great use of honey and

the shop had a grand array of honey jars. As I have said, I bought several varieties of honey there and in due course I came to know the bee-keeper. He was the only beekeeper I ever met who lived in Adderley Street.

Keith Rawlins was his name, a lanky, middle-aged Australian who had learnt the bee-keeping technique in the flowering eucalyptus forests down under. I never really found out why he had started operations from Cape Town; but he said it was because he found the right sort of honey-yielders within a few miles of Adderley Street. So he put up at the old Carlton Hotel, bought a couple of trucks and hundreds of hives and placed them all over the Milnerton and Durbanville countryside. The gum trees provided a luxurious

pasture for his bees; the mimosas and wattle kept the honey flow going when the eucalyptus forests were not flowering. After the blossoms had faded he packed up and moved by night to a new area. Of course he had problems. He had to use a lot of smoke when he released his bees in unfamiliar surroundings, but they soon became docile and brought in the honey. Water had to be kept handy in drums for the bees were thirsty in hot weather. Bush fires sometimes menaced his apiaries. Yet it was an interesting occupation. I think Keith Rawlins was working his way about the world as a beekeeper. He knew more about bees and honey than any other man I ever met and I was sorry when he moved on to another country.

Rawlins had wandered over wide areas from his Adderley Street headquarters. No mean botanist, he could recognise most of the South African bee plants from the *boerboom* to the *bloubos* to the *waterbessie* and *dopperkiaat*. He knew the prickly pear and lucerne, buckwheat and sunflower. Apple trees yielded light amber honey of good quality but not much of it. He had a higher regard for oranges and plums. Bees made eagerly for loquat trees. Rawlins said heather honey was the finest of all. "Open a pot in a warm room and the lovely aroma can be detected immediately," declared Rawlins. And he quoted a verse from Robert Louis Stevenson:

*From the bonny bells of heather
They brewed a drink lang-syne,
Was sweeter far than honey,*

Was stronger far than wine.

However, the eucalyptus trees provided Rawlins with most of his income. He showed me the pale straw honey from the mellidora gum, dense and aromatic, with a strong and typical flavour. The red flowering gum yielded a mild golden honey, an unusual type that could be drawn out into long fibres. But it was the *spekboom* or elephant's foot, an evergreen shrub flowering in early summer, that provided an enormous honey flow. Beekeepers tracked the bees from *spekboom* to nests and stocked their hives. There was a Cape primrose that opened in the evening; the bees waited and returned safely with the honey in the dark. The weeping willow was a good honey producer; and wild aloes, wisterias and peas all helped

the honey flow. Rawlins had tasted many interesting honeys in the Cape. One that impressed him greatly came from the *Protea milliflora* or *suiker-kan* flowers; a pure white honey with a marvellous flavour. There was also a rare *ghwarrie* bush honey, pale and delicate. Honey varied in colour from white to black and in South Africa the light honeys were most popular. Dark honeys such as wild aloe, buckwheat and heather often had more delicious flavours. Amber honey from *skilpadbessies* on the dunes was good and Rawlins had tasted some with distinct herbal flavours. "It is the pollen that counts – not the beauty of the flower," he informed me. "I like the deep yellow honey from a fodder plant called sainfoin but a coffee flower yields excellent honey without a trace of

the coffee flavour. Thyme honey has a spiciness that cannot be mistaken. You can buy avocado honey, clover honey, rosemary honey and the famous hymettus with a flavour like roses. Once in my life I tasted a superb honey from an unknown source. It was so memorable that I spent weeks trying to trace it to the flower. I failed completely. If I could have marketed that honey on a large scale I would have made a fortune. But a close second is the spicy honey from grapefruit blossom."

Rawlins knew a lot about poisonous honeys and he had a little museum of rare and dangerous specimens. One was called *noors* (Afrikaans for ill-tempered) from an euphorbia that provided the Bushmen with arrow poison. *Noors* honey burnt the mouth and throat and was rather too

common in some districts. Rawlins also found the wild almond honey unpalatable. He said that some honey might be poisonous at a certain time of the year and safe at other times. And he reminded me of Xenophon's army of ten thousand men who ate honey while on the march. Some became drunk, some fell insensible and others went mad. From the Sandveld round about Vredendal the roving Rawlins had gathered samples of other bitter honeys; *gannabos* honey; *seepganna* honey from a bush that was once used on farms for soap-making, and *swartganna* honey. There was also a *bosghwarrie* honey with unpleasant cathartic properties.

"Nevertheless, honey is a great medicine," Rawlins declared. "You can treat rheumatism with a blend of honey, sulphur, cream of tartar and

gum quaiacum. Many cough medicines contain honey. Honey and castor oil help asthma and catarrh sufferers. You can restore the voice with honey, lemon juice and mustard. Honey and cod liver oil form one of the best tonics. Honey is easily digested and it can be taken by some patients who are unable to eat anything else. It strengthens the heart and liver and feeds the skin and hair. Put honey on a cut and you have an efficient antiseptic. Athletes, air pilots and deep-sea divers are advised to take honey. Lime blossom honey puts some nervous people to sleep as effectively as a pill. Honey is a mild laxative and a diuretic. Honey gives you an appetite but it does not cause obesity. Eucalyptus honey is the thing for a cold. Honey

is really a concentrated food giving the body all that it requires.”

After this expert panegyric I felt a little diffident about cross-examining Keith Rawlins. Yet I always have to ask for reasons. “What is it that gives honey these magic properties?” I inquired. “We have been eating honey for centuries and all its properties have not yet been explained,” Rawlins replied. “It is the oldest sweet known to mankind. Bushman paintings in South Africa, cave paintings in Spain, show that primitive man robbed the wild hives thousands of years ago. Of course the plant source plays a large part in the value of the honey; it determines the colour and flavour and quality. Honey starts as a drop of nectar in the flower and it is transformed by the bee into grape sugar and fruit

sugar, aided by the scented gums and oils of the plant source. It contains iron, phosphorus, manganese, lime and sulphur; all valuable and easily assimilable so that they get into the bloodstream. The process is so complex that scientists cannot unravel it. Honey contains digestive enzymes. The most convincing proof of the value of honey is given by the devastating effect sugar has on our systems. Foolishly we gave up honey several centuries ago and took to sugar. Now look at us! All sorts of gastric and nervous disorders have appeared and we have ruined our teeth.”

Rawlins told me that he could gather fifteen tons of honey in a month when he was working hard; or rather when the bees were doing their best for him. Often he had half a million

bees on his trucks when he was following the honey track at night. It was a good life, he said, a useful life; and he had no difficulty in selling his honey. He aroused my interest in honey, an interest that has never faded. Honey, you may remember, came on the scene very early in South Africa's recorded story. Vasco da Gama landed at St. Helena Bay and captured a Hottentot who had been gathering honey. The terrified Hottentot was taken on board ship and given presents of beads and other trifles; and the Portuguese questioned him hopefully after showing him spices, gold and pearls. It was no use. He only knew where to find honey. Le Vaillant, the epicurean French traveller, watched the Hottentots making an intoxicating liquor from honey and a root,

leaving these ingredients to ferment in water. Bushmen along the Cape west coast had their own brew, honeycombs full of young bees squeezed into lukewarm water. A plant was added to hasten the fermentation. This so-called "bee-wine" is made to this day in certain parts of the Cape, but not with the full approval of the police. The modern recipe includes sugar and yeast and the potent drink is known as "Korree" or "Karie", pronounced curry.

South Africa's indigenous black bee is a vicious creature, ready to attack and sting to death any sort of intruder. It is supposed to have flown over, presumably by island-hopping, from Madagascar. This is a hard-working bee producing good honey; but the high-pitched whining hum of

a swarm of black bees sounds like a deadly dynamo. Brown bees, found all over South Africa, are believed to be a cross between the black bees and the Italian queens brought or imported by Huguenot settlers. They are large and docile, best of the wild honey bees in the opinion of some experts. Yellow stripes on their abdomens provide evidence of the Ligurian strain. In the Caledon district there are bees that appear to have a Caucasian origin.

Monks are great beekeepers. At Mariannhill in Natal there was a Brother Lucian who was a great authority on honey. He said that beekeeping called for a special bent and those who possessed it found a noble employment. Brother Lucian preferred clean sections with beautiful white virgin comb to any bottled

honey. I think this is the view of epicures, though comb honey varies from year to year while liquid honey is easier to produce. Comb honey is the natural form. Flavour and aroma suffer during the extraction process. Some producers drop strips of comb honey into ajar of liquid honey and this "chunk honey" looks attractive and costs a little more. Creamed or whipped honey is a comparatively new form and is designed to spread easily. You also find blends of honeys; for example, orange blossom honey is too sweet for some palates so it is blended with clover. Among the aristocratic honeys are jasmine; the crystal-white rosemary, acacia and lotus.

Bees work themselves to death gathering honey from dawn to dusk and no one can explain this useful

impulse. The air lift usually covers a two-mile radius from the hive. Beekeepers arrange their colonies in accordance with this range. The frenzied period may last only for a few weeks or a few months; then the bees must be fed on honey or honey with sugar syrup to enable the colony to survive until the next rush. The flowering gums of the Cape are rivalled (or surpassed) from the bees' point of view by the pink aloes season of three months in the Northern Transvaal. Cavalcades of beekeepers gather with their bee millions along the Pienaar's River in June, July and August. Warnings to motorists are placed on the roads: "Please do not leave your cars. You are now passing through the largest concentration of beehives in the world." The bees feed on banana, papaw and other blooms

before and after the pink aloe season; but the pink aloes give such generous supplies of nectar that the bees leave everything else when the bell shaped flowers appear. Pink aloe honey is clear and possesses wonderful keeping qualities. But the flavours of honey are as varied as the wines of the world; a taster like Keith Rawlins might spend his whole life adding to his experience but never knowing all the honeys.

Honey is imperishable. I have seen in the British Museum honey from the tombs of Egypt, honey four thousand years old. A pound of honey, so Rawlins assured me, held the same nourishment as six pints of milk or thirty eggs. Only the date has the same food value. Honey has its vintage years like wine but never does it fail to provide energy. Everest

climbers had tubes of honey in their packs. Here indeed is food in its purest form, glowing with the sunlight of happy bygone seasons in forests and on the veld.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN
MELLOW, RICH AND RIPE

*Sublime tobacco! which from east to
west*

*Cheers the tar's labours or the
Turkman's rest.*

*Divine in hookas, glorious in a pipe,
When tipped with amber, mellow,
rich and ripe;*

*Like other charmers, wooing the
caress,*

*More dazzlingly when daring in full
dress.*

*Yet thy true lovers more admire by
far*

*Thy naked beauties - give me a
cigar!*

LORD BYRON

BEFORE I gave up smoking many years ago I used to buy my expensive English cigarettes at a Cape Town

tobacconist's shop managed by Mynheer Jacob Wagenaar. He had once owned a small cigar factory in Amsterdam but this had failed. So he had emigrated; and now this elderly man had been serving behind the counter as an employee for years without a trace of bitterness or ill-humour.

Possibly the amiable Wagenaar found consolation in the merchandise he sold. He was not a heavy smoker, he informed me, but when he lit a cigar his sense of enjoyment was plain to see. Wagenaar knew tobacco in all its forms. He discoursed intelligently on roll tobacco and Russian cigarettes; calabash and *waboom* pipes; cigars from Oudtshoorn or the Vuelta Abajo in Cuba; or the dark luxurious snuff known in the trade as Café Royale,

combining the flavours of coffee, brandy and cream. Wagenaar could also sell you a walking-stick with expert knowledge of chestnut and ash. I often lingered there among the tobacco jars and pipe-racks in that fragrant shop listening to the wisdom of Wagenaar. The knowing specialist always fascinates me (as you have already noticed) whether he deals in books or spices, cough mixtures or Havanas.

Tobacco is supposed to be one of America's gifts – or curses – to the Old World. Wagenaar was doubtful about that. References in old manuscripts suggest that smoking had become a habit in various parts of Europe, Africa and the East before the Columbian discovery. Botanists have traced a tobacco species that appears to have grown wild in the

Old World long before the North and South American leaves reached Europe. Portuguese explorers carried tobacco seeds with them and spread tobacco among African tribesmen and Eastern peoples. It was regarded as a medicine and a disinfectant in those days but it soon became a self-indulgent habit. Tobacco farming started at the Cape on a small scale during the Van Riebeeck period. Peter Kolbe, the German traveller, left an amusing description of the effects of tobacco on the Hottentots early in the eighteenth century: "The Hottentots, men and women, are dotingly fond of tobacco. A Hottentot who is in want of tobacco and who has no other means to procure it will perform a hard day's work for half an ounce; and when he gets it, will hug it in transports; stare with a

crack-brained joy on the precious reward and laugh, caper and swagger like a fellow quite out of his wits.”

Tobacco was currency in those days. Natives used water pipes with stone or earthen bowls. Ox or antelope horns and reeds or the shin bones of animals served as pipes. Calabash is one of the old South African pipe materials; the wood that was used by primitive tribes as a beer container. But the shaping and polishing of a high-grade calabash pipe is a complicated process and those pipes (with meerscham tops) are usually expensive. The *waboom*, once regarded as fit only for firewood, has also become a reliable pipe material and *waboom* pipes are made in Worcester. Pipes with Paul Kruger bowls are the most famous South African pipes. President Kruger smoked one

himself and gave it to the telegraphist at Machadodorp when he was leaving the Transvaal for Delagoa Bay. Pipe craftsmen are rare in South Africa nowadays; it is a dying art in this age of cigarettes. But the pipe-smoker has always been looked upon as the solid thinker; a symbol of the philosopher. Van Riebeeck loved his pipe. When he sent expeditions to trade with the Hottentots they always carried pipes and tobacco as well as trinkets.

I found a pamphlet by James Barry Munnik, a Cape Town snuff manufacturer and tobacco dealer, in the South African Public Library.⁸ It was

⁸ Munnik's mother was in danger when Munnik was born. The celebrated Dr James Barry, called in to deal with the emergency, performed the first completely successful Caesarean operation; previously either the

printed in the sixties of last century, when tobacco was still held in high esteem as a medicine. Munnik quoted a poet “P.V.R.” on the subject:

*Specific in alle rampen!
Pest der doodelijke dampen!
Souverein, antidotaal!
Panacé van gouden blaâren.*

mother or the child had died. Mr Eric Vertue, who investigated the event, stated that Dr Barry had watched two Caesarean operations in Edinburgh but had never before attempted one. The date of the Cape Town operation was July 25, 1826. It was not until 1834 that a surgeon in Britain repeated the achievement. Munnik was named James Barry in honour of the surgeon. General James Barry Munnik Hertzog was a descendant of the snuff manufacturer. (Only after her death was Dr Barry discovered to be a woman probably making her the first female doctor to qualify in Britain. Ed)

Munnik said in his pamphlet that tobacco was being cultivated at Alphen and Stellenberg in the Peninsula and also at Heidelberg (Cape) and Riversdale. This tobacco, which he used in his factory, was equal to imported varieties. He gave instructions on the making of “Kaapsche Boerentabak” or roll-tobacco. Uitenhage was turning out cigars, cheroots and cut tobacco in the eighteen-forties. Away in the wilds of the Cedarberg tobacco farmers were producing a strong twist that an agricultural official described as “suitable for the depraved taste of consumers in Namaqualand”. It had “excellent combustibility” and a roll weighing four pounds fetched about four shillings. By the time it reached

Damaraland a roll had doubled in value.

Cape Town smokers were offered “a cask of cheroots captured from an enemy ship” early last century. Venables and Viret of Strand Street were selling Havana “segars” and at the same period L. J. de Jongh of Loop Street advertised “good Cape-made segars of American tobacco and Dutch chewing tobacco”. A record cargo of half a million Manila cigars reached Cape Town in the eighteen-sixties and were sold by the firm of H. and E. Suffret “at a very high rate”. The Misdorp brothers were importing Virginia leaf at this period and making good cigars in Cape Town. Cigars from the Transvaal and Beaufort West were also on the market. Smokers went to “cigar divans” in those days; smok-

ing in public was considered vulgar. A divan in Longmarket Street invited patrons “to smoke a cigar, sip coffee and read the Cape and London papers while parties who are fond of the fashionable and scientific game of chess can also be accommodated with lemonade as well as coffee at a moderate charge”.

Oudtshoorn farmers were growing tobacco in the middle of last century but it became the main cash crop only after the ostrich feather collapse. Pocock started his tobacco factory there in the eighteen-eighties and imported cigar-makers from Holland. This pioneer venture failed but later efforts in the cigar field have been more successful.

George Findlay opened a tobacco shop in Grave Street in the middle of last century and placed a life-sized

effigy of a Highlander at the door. This was the custom (of mysterious origin) in Europe and America; though most tobacconists preferred a Red Indian, a sailor holding a clay pipe or a Turk in flowing robes. Cape Town frowned so heavily on public smoking that as late as the eighteen-fifties a Mr Charles Becker was fined for smoking in Adderley Street near the Groote Kerk during a service. Tinder boxes were certainly a danger in the days of thatch. Nevertheless the habit spread. Cheroots arrived from Natal. J. S. Dobie, a visitor from Scotland, wrote in the eighteen-sixties: "How the people in this country do smoke. It is a continuous puff". Corn mills were being turned into snuff factories for snuffing was looked upon as more respectable than smoking.

Cigarettes became a familiar sight in Cape Town about a century ago, ten years after the first cigarette factory had started work in England. Among the Cape pioneers were the Misdorp brothers of Plein Street; they advertised "cigarettes, newly invented, also machines, paper and tobacco". Early imported brands of cigarettes were "Star of the East", "Golden Seal" and "Uncle Sam". Turkish and Russian cigarettes were sold, the cheapest at one guinea a thousand. The "Cape Argus" received samples of "Varsity Blue" cigarettes and described the boxes as "works of art". In 1885 this newspaper reported that cigarette smoking had become general. A Plein Street firm was making cigarettes from the finest American and Turkish tobacco. Otto Landsberg, who you will meet later,

put “Cape Favourite” cigarettes on the market. It only remained for Oscar Wilde to sum up the new fashion: “A cigarette is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it leaves one unsatisfied. What more can you want?”

However, my friend Jacob Wagenaar remained faithful to cigars all his life. He said that smoking a good cigar was a leisurely occupation, like enjoying good wine. They did not go together, of course, but cigars and wine appealed to the same type of man, the epicure. “You can ruin a glass of sherry or port with a cigar - and yet a memorable dinner is not complete without an after-dinner cigar,” declared Wagenaar. “And remember - never inhale a cigar.”

I suggested to Wagenaar that there was a lot of pretentious and bogus

ritual about cigar smoking and he agreed entirely. The man who squeezed a cigar between his fingers and made it crackle was not really testing it; he was probably breaking it, so that the outer leaves would burn unevenly. Biting the end was a great mistake as it tore the wrapping. A proper cigar cutter or sharp knife should be used. The cigar snob held the unlit cigar under his nose and inhaled noisily with a look of deep expertise, but that was the way to test a wine, not a cigar. It was important to light a cigar properly; you had to draw first and then apply the light. Aroma was spoilt if the cigar remained too long in the flame. Wagenaar said it was essential to keep a cigar going. A re-lighted cigar, a cold cigar, gave you a bitter smoke. Cigars were meant to be

smoked very deliberately, without puffing. The length of ash was of no importance at all, though it did prove that the cigar had been rolled efficiently.

Wagenaar saluted those Cuban cigar makers who still rolled their cigars by hand. He spoke affectionately of the shades of cigars from *claro* (light yellow) down the scale to the deep brown *maduro*. He showed me the shapes, from the pointed *perfecto* to the long, thin *panatella*, the thick *corona*, the short *brevia*. The mammoth dark cigar he held up for me to admire was then known as a Clemenceau; now it is a Churchill. "A great cigar is designed by an artist," said Wagenaar. "You must select the right leaves for fillers and wrappers using touch and smell the whole time. The cigars must go into

a cedar wood box to mature. Cigars are just like wine in that respect. Pack cigars in aluminium tubes and they cannot breathe. Smoke a cigar too soon and you know it at once - it is like a wine drunk too young."

Naturally this cigar expert placed Havanas first but he admitted that Jamaica produced some good cigars.⁹ "Soil and climate and hereditary skill - that is what you need, just like wine," said Wagenaar. "Jamaican cigars are full-flavoured, with excellent filler leaf. But give me a choice and I take Upmanns, Por Larranagas, Monte Christos, Hoyo de Monte-reys." Of course Wagenaar admitted

⁹ Monterey cigars, hand-wrapped in the Canary Islands, have come to the fore in recent years and are among the best in the world today. They have the four essential qualities-they look, feel, taste and smell good.

that the heyday of the cigar had passed. It is more than twenty years since I consulted him and nothing has happened since then to restore the cigar to the great popularity it enjoyed during the first half of last century. Cigars almost killed the pipe and the snuff-box at one period; then the cigarette arrived, first as a rival, afterwards as a conqueror. The cigar is a beautiful relic of the nineteenth century.

Of course the cigar trade has never given up hope of a revival. Advertising campaigns have suggested, very cautiously, that cigars are better for you than cigarettes. Experiments have been carried out recently with every kind of blend, shape, size, filter and flavour. Yes, they even tried artificial flavours such as rum and camphor. Wagenaar would not

have been amused. The cigar industry has provided some people with a great deal more than mellow smoke. One man covered the walls of his room with cigar-box lids, so that the atmosphere resembled a forest. Others have collected cigar boxes for their dazzling beauty; the gold medals, portraits and landscapes and other adornments. Osbert Sitwell was among these devotees; he praised the mulatto cupids and cornucopias of pineapples, the luscious flowers and fruit. The bands that only a cad fails to remove also have their admirers. Stuck on plates or trays and varnished, these cummerbands of the weed make striking displays. Designed originally to prevent the smoker from staining his fingers, they are now proud heraldic emblems. Only a few years

ago a film star from Johannesburg was presented with a cigar band as a wedding ring - and she accepted it. Dr Jan Kromhout, chief Afrikaans lecturer at the Johannesburg College of Education, is the leading South African cigar-band collector. He has more than three thousand bands in his album, ranging from old German designs with emperors and Bismarck to later bands from a Transvaal bushveld cigar factory - rarities now because the factory soon closed down.

I find pleasure in allowing the lilting cigar names to roll off my tongue, the glamorous brand names, Estralla and Eldorado, Partaga and Cabana. Poets have seized on the romance of the cigar and admired the smoke curling away like the mists of a dream. Kipling spoke of “a harem of

dusky beauties, fifty tied in a string”. Kipling wrote the poem everyone knows:

*There's peace in a Laranaga,
there's calm in a Henry Clay;
But the best cigar in an hour is
finished and thrown away.*

Some women enjoy the aroma of a cigar and a few smoke dainty chiquitas. Most women, I think, object to the odour that clings to curtains; the chewed cigars in ash-trays; the way men concentrate on their cigars rather than feminine company. Kate Carrington took the opposite view in her poem:

*What is it comes through the
deepening dusk,
Something sweeter than jasmine
scent,*

*Sweeter than rose and violet
blent,
More potent in power than orange
or musk?
The scent of a good cigar.*

Horace Greeley described a cigar as having "a fire at one end of it and a fool at the other". Karl Marx, however, declared that he could not think without a cigar; a luxurious taste for the founder of revolutionary socialism. Sibelius the composer had to have ten cigars a day. Cuban workmen demand free cigars and that arrangement costs the industry a fortune. Bulwer Lytton, the English novelist, declared that a cigar was as great a comfort to a man as a good cry to a woman. So the great names in the cigar world flourish: Bolivar and Manuel Garcias, Murias and Bock.

Jacob Wagenaar was only an occasional snuffer but he had the same kind of sentimental attitude towards snuff that he showed over his cigars. "Smoke is the ghost of tobacco," Wagenaar used to say. "Cigars are the body. Snuff is the soul. Nevertheless I stick to cigars." Cape Town has known the scent of snuff for centuries. Portuguese navigators handed out snuff to the natives; the Dutch settlers carried on sneezing. Lieutenant James Holman, the blind naval officer who rode about the Cape early last century, carried in his light baggage two canisters of snuff "as offerings of gallantry to the Dutch housewives". Snuff-boxes were treasured then as they are now so that they have become valuable antiques. Mr James Ingram announced in the "Govern-

ment Gazette” in 1831 that he had lost a silver snuff -box bearing the head of King William the Third of glorious memory. “It was stolen from my house and sold by the thief for five shillings to a farmer in Hottentot Square,” added Mr Ingram. “If not returned without delay, proceedings will be taken against the receiver.”

Barry Munnik, the tobacco dealer I mentioned earlier, built the first steam mill for snuff manufacture in Cape Town about the middle of last century. One of his rivals in this secretive trade was the remarkable Otto Landsberg, a German who arrived in 1818 with his father and three brothers. The Landsbergs were of royal descent and had owned a castle in Germany. Otto was twelve when he landed, a gifted boy who

became a painter, violinist and pianist. He owned the Slangkop farm near Kommetjie at one time. His snuff factory was in Greenmarket Square. He died in 1905 at the age of one hundred and one, leaving an estate valued at ninety-five thousand pounds.

Snuff is supposed to be good for you in moderation. Landsberg said so and Wagenaar thought it might be useful for treating some complaints; he had heard that workers in the golden haze of snuff-mills seldom caught influenza or colds. It was a stimulant, he said, not a narcotic. Medicated snuffs contain menthol and are used for catarrh. Snuff is a decongestant; some people claim that it clears the head and sharpens the wits. Addicts say that snuff is the final reason for the human nose.

Opponents have denounced snuff-taking as the dirtiest habit ever to achieve social prominence.

When I was a young reporter there were a number of snuffers among the printers in the "Cape Argus" works. Lead fumes were more noticeable at that period than they are today. I believe miners take snuff for a similar reason; while longdistance truck drivers keep themselves awake with snuff. Clergymen and schoolmasters are also said to be snuff addicts but their reasons are more obscure. Snuff has no social or racial limits. Zulus grow tobacco round their huts, grind the leaves to powder and use snuff spoons carved out of ivory. Dingaan owned a famous snuff gourd decorated by a Zulu who had visited Cape Town. It gave the great chief an idea of the civilisation

he had never seen; people climbing stairs, public buildings, carriages, cavalry with swords and a grandfather clock. Mr R. C. Camp, a Cape Town snuff-box collector, had more than one hundred examples of native snuff-boxes, ranging from the carved palm-wood Ovambo boxes to reed cylinders covered with beads. Other tribes used moth cocoons, horns and bamboo. Napoleon owned scores of snuff-boxes and some of these came to Cape Town after his death. Sotheby's sold a snuff-box in London some years ago for two thousand guineas. Cape silver snuff-boxes fetch high prices; the Lotter family made beautiful oval boxes with gilt interiors.

Commander Maurice Green, that great Africana collector, always hoped to set eyes on an historic and

valuable snuff-box that played a part in a Cape Legislative Council political crisis during the seventies of last century. Members of the upper house had to possess movable property worth two thousand pounds. The parties were almost equal in numbers and were divided on the question of responsible government for the Cape Colony. One vote would have settled the matter but the qualification for membership of the Hon. P. E. de Roubaix, M.L.C., was challenged. A committee valued his house, his carriage, his horses and even his spoons and forks. These assets fell short of two thousand pounds. At this dramatic moment, however, Mr de Roubaix produced an exquisite gold snuff-box, the lid embossed with diamonds and precious stones, the inside containing scenes in

miniature of Constantinople and the Bosphorous. It was a gift from the Sultan of Turkey in recognition of De Roubaix's services as Consul-General for Turkey. Mr G. Boettger, a jeweller, valued the snuff-box at three thousand pounds. Another jeweller gave evidence that he could make a replica for about six hundred pounds. However, the snuff-box tipped the scale. The committee decided in De Roubaix's favour. De Roubaix cast his vote for responsible government. But where is that glittering snuff-box now?

I called snuff-making a secretive business and indeed it is. They never show you the blending and flavouring processes when you visit a snuff mill; these are carried out in locked rooms, like the distilling of famous liqueurs. There are hundreds of

blends of snuff and among them are old family recipes that have never been written down. Lovers of exotic perfumes find great charm in snuff. Oils of flowers, spices such as cloves and cinnamon, extracts of lavender and peppermint all go into scented varieties. You can have orange or lemon snuff; lily of the valley or new-mown hay. Some like a rich black snuff with a full bouquet; others prefer the mild aromatic herbs of Golden Cardinal or Apple Blossom. The names go to the head like wine. Wagenaar had in the shop Black Rappee and Jockey Club, Carnation and Grand Opera, and the light, dry Irish High Toast with the toasted flavour. Celery has been used to flavour snuff. Rum and whisky go well in snuff and there is a market for a coffee and brandy blend.

“How do you take snuff -and how often?” I asked Wagenaar.

“A heavy snuffer may take thirty pinches a day - obviously too much,” Wagenaar replied. “The true snuffer feels the old magic every time he takes a pinch between thumb and forefinger. Inhale quickly without dropping a grain. Never sprinkle your snuff on the back of the hand and use the nose as a vacuum cleaner. The experienced snuffer, by the way, rarely sneezes. That is the sign of a beginner.” Wagenaar told me that snuff improved with age like wine. Some addicts laid down cellars of snuff. Unfortunately the cigarette had a deep adverse influence on this charming symbol of a more leisurely age. Snuff and cigars will never die out but there can be no return to the days of Beau Brummel.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
FRESH AND WHOLESOME

*In short, it's a market where
everything's sold,
Where potatoes and turnips are
turned into gold:
Where agents and shippers
provision the clippers
And skinny Cape chickens are sold
to the skippers.*

ANON.

AT first glance you might have taken old Jimmy Linton for Cape Town's greatest nobody. After all, a lavatory attendant does not often get into "Who's Who" and even the telephone book may ignore him. Yet old Linton was not such a nonentity as he looked. He knew the market. Linton was a small fellow with weak blue eyes and a drooping moustache.

He walked like a cripple but there was nothing seriously wrong with him apart from corns. His chalet was in Queen Victoria Street close to the library.

It is still there, a charming little Victorian convenience with a picturesque slate roof and iron filigree decorations. I often dropped in after a spell in the library; and there was Linton in a tiny, glassed-in cubicle. He had an electric kettle and he made himself as snug as anyone could hope to be in the section marked "Gentlemen". Often he gave tea parties there, with his guests leaning against the urinal partitions and wash-basins; a respectful circle listening intently to Linton. Some of them looked as though they needed the refreshment provided by the kindly attendant.

Linton seemed to know me. One day he remarked to my astonishment: "You're a journalist, aren't you? I'm going in for journalism - you'll see me in the office next month." He looked round the lavatory with a sad expression. "Yes, it's a bit of a wrench, but I've resigned." Sure enough Linton turned up in the office. During a more successful period of his career he had held a job at the municipal market in Sir Lowry Road. Apparently there had been an episode which Linton did not care to discuss; something which had brought about a change of occupation. Now he was returning to the market as a newspaper correspondent. It was not a staff job but Linton was to receive something more than a penny a line. Everything depended on the way he filled the space.

Fortunately the hard-bitten sub-editors were sympathetic towards this old man earning a precarious living and usually they took all he wrote. I soon began to look forward to Linton's daily visits because he brought all sorts of unpredictable items with him from the market. One day it would be a grotesque potato resembling a politician; then a more interesting rarity, a cucumber two feet long or some beautiful English red currants grown on a farm in the Sutherland district four thousand feet above sea-level. Linton presented me with a parcel of dried leaves from a scented gum and assured me that if I put them in my pillow they would keep away fleas and moths, cockroaches and rats. It was the folklore of the veld that Linton brought into the office. He had tried all the

medical remedies of the Cape countryside; pomegranate root for tape-worms, *braambos* roots boiled in water for diarrhoea. Mention a fruit or vegetable and Linton could tell you a story about it. He also knew where to find the best of everything in the market; he liked his food to be fresh and wholesome.

I met Linton at the market during the various fruit and vegetable seasons and benefited greatly from his conducted tours of halls, lorries, wagons and carts. Linton was on good terms with dozens of farmers, especially the descendants of those German peasants who turned parts of the sandy Cape Flats wilderness into market gardens. Those fairly prosperous farmers from Philippi spoke of the years when their parents, and even young children, toiled from

dawn to dusk and then returned to wattle and daub huts for an evening meal of salt fish. Women plodded through the sand for miles with eggs and butter and sacks of vegetables on their backs. They worked so hard during the last three decades of last century that they were able to build a Lutheran Church and a school.

Linton also introduced me to members of the famous Punt family. Their ancestor came from Holland as a schoolmaster in the middle of last century. He turned to vegetable farming and now a legion of Punts dominate some of the vleis on the Cape Flats, growing everything from sweet-corn to flowers. If you can win a prize at the Goodwood agricultural show in competition with the Punt clan then you are an expert. The Punts not only grow the

well-known vegetables; they have also introduced unusual varieties. Celeriac, the turnip-rooted celery, became popular in Cape Town after the Punts had grown it in their experimental beds and shown it at Goodwood. It looks like a brown turnip and can be eaten raw.

Carrots are kings on the Cape Flats farms. They are in great demand all the year round, not only by housewives but also by racehorses and canning factories. Carrots roasted with the meat form a traditional Cape dish. But enormous crops of potatoes are also grown on the Flats. Linton informed me that the ordinary white potato was a wretched vegetable at the Cape up to the middle of last century. The sweet potato or *patat* was the favourite and true potatoes were neglected. Sweet potatoes were

imported from Java centuries ago and flourished in the Cape soil. Malay cooks prepared *gestoofde patats*; chipped and boiled over a slow fire and served with cinnamon sauce. Or *kerrie patats*, small pieces steeped in brine, cooked and served with a hot curry sauce. Or just fried in boiling fat and eaten with fried snoek. You could make a sweet potato salad. Sweet potatoes boiled in their skins were among the great dishes in the wheat belt. So the white potato languished and one writer declared that a bar of soap was just as palatable. Then a Caledon farmer named T. B. Bayley introduced new and succulent types of potatoes from England; waxy and firm or floury, and also new potatoes. The sweet potatoes are still with us but the

Majestic potato from Scotland now rivals the oriental *patat*.

Linton pointed out the tomato varieties, from Golden Queen to the dishevelled yet palatable fruit known as Cape Wrinkled. He said the Portuguese carried tomato plants to Africa and the East; but it was only in the nineties of last century that the Cape housewife accepted the tomato. At one time it was regarded as poisonous; later the lovely tomato was a social outcast, like garlic in some circles today. Hildagonda Duckitt did not despise either garlic or tomato; she made a splendid tomato sauce blended with onions, garlic, red chillies, ginger, spices and vinegar. But the time when South African farmers could grow tomatoes worth millions of Rands a year still lay far ahead.

“What calls back the past like a rich pumpkin pie?” quoted Linton one night when all the pumpkins in the Cape seemed to be rolling into the market. Pumpkins were among the first crops grown by Van Riebeeck and the pumpkin has held its place in the story of the Cape ever since those early days. Not only pumpkin pie, you understand, but boiled pumpkin with butter, pumpkin bredie, pumpkin fritters and coarse pumpkin bread. Linton said that he had watched a Cape Flats housewife giving her son a *dopper* haircut using half a pumpkin to guide her scissors. A dried pumpkin shell makes a useful bowl and farmers sometimes use them for holding seed. “Pumpkins give no trouble and a farmer eats pumpkin bredie, a stew of mutton, pumpkin and red peppers

with as much sheep-tail fat as the dish will hold, and is content," summed up Lady Duff Gordon.

Linton said he liked to see strings of onions hanging up in a kitchen. Farmers who followed that ancient belief kept epidemics out of the house. He pointed out creamy-yellow Cape straw onions, Australian brown, Caledon Globes and De Wildt from the Transvaal. Garlic? Linton believed in garlic as a medicine. "It must be clean, white and hard," he declared. Garlic had not swept into so many households at that period; now it has become a pungent wave with overwhelming aroma. It was still a Cinderella admired mainly by foreigners - the breath of France, Italy and Greece, not South Africa.

"Figs are orphans in South Africa," declared Linton one night when he saw me staring at a purple mound of figs. "The old Cape fig, small and white, has a good flavour but it is hard to find nowadays. Farmers will plant a fig tree at the backdoor but they will not grow figs on a large scale. There is a demand. Fig jam is popular, green fig preserve is an old favourite, and a raw fig is best of all. But they need a lot of water, the birds devour them by the ton, ants and insects are enemies. So you often find a shortage of figs."

Among the rarities at the market was watercress. Linton noted it when he saw it, bought some to use as a tonic, and quoted Culpepper the herbalist in his report. "The juices of watercress mixed with vinegar are very good for those that are dull and have

the lethargy. Watercress pottage is a remedy to cleanse the blood in spring and consume the gross humours winter hath left behind.” Mrs Dijkman, a pioneer among the Cape cookery authors, devised a watercress salad prepared like lettuce salad with vinegar, salt, oil, mustard and two eggs. She said it was very wholesome, especially for consumptives.

Cherries were also rare in the nineteen twenties. James Logan the enterprising “Laird of Matjesfontein” planted cherries there at the end of last century; crops of fine quality were raised but not in large quantities. You find very few references to cherries in old Cape literature dealing with cuisine; not a cherry pie or cherry jam anywhere. Linton said a little snow was needed for cherry

production and there were few farms in the Cape with that sort of climate.

Mangoes came from Natal in those days if they reached the Cape Town market at all. Hildagonda Duckitt had a mango chutney recipe in one of her books but suggested apples as a substitute for the almost unprocurable mango. However, there are now scattered mango plantations in various parts of the Western Cape. The fruit is a bad traveller but it has been canned in South Africa and the housewife can prepare mango marmalade or sweet pickle. Some people think the flavour of mangoes is superior to grapes. It certainly makes a fine ice cream.

One hot February night Linton pointed to the truckloads of grapes rolling in from Constantia and declared: “There come the world’s

finest table grapes - the largest and the sweetest, the *hanepoot*.” He said the grapes bore no resemblance at all to a cock’s foot; the word was a euphemism and should really be *hanekloot* (testicle). The white variety came to the Cape from the Mediterranean; the claret-red grape seems to have originated at the Cape as a deviation from the white. Sweet wines and raisins are made from the *hanepoot*. Farmers loved the *hanepoot* because a vineyard planted with that variety would last a century. Coloured farm labourers used to date important events from the *hanepoot* season.

March saw the peaches arriving in their wood-wool trays. I asked Linton what he thought of them and he replied: “Neither our best nor our worst fruit. French peaches are the

finest in the world and when the Huguenots settled here they brought good recipes for pickling peaches with onions, vinegar, red chillies and ginger. Yellow-fleshed peaches are best canned or bottled or cooked. If you want to eat a peach raw go to France for the Montreuil peaches that Louis XIV enjoyed. Elbertas from Italy are next on the list. Did you ever hear of the lazy poet called James Thomson? He grew peaches in his garden but he could not be bothered to pluck them. So he just stood beside a peach that was bursting with ripeness, bit off the most inviting piece and left the rest for the birds.”

I thought this discourse was pretty good for an ex-lavatory attendant. Linton also told me that English gooseberries were first grown at the

Cape by the German artist Wilhelm Langschmidt, who farmed at Grabouw. At the same period, the eighteen-fifties, rhubarb first came on the Cape Town market; a gardener named Upjohn grew rhubarb successfully at Rondebosch and sold thousands of hardy young plants. "Rhubarb is cheap and good for you – but it does not appeal to me," Linton added.

Chestnuts appeared on the market in autumn, those useful nuts that grow well at Paarl and Stellenbosch and go into puddings and sweets. Pecans were seldom on sale; farmers were against planting for their grandchildren. The trees last for a century or more and become enormous. Sweet, delicious pecans are easy to crack and they are versatile in the kitchen. However, you have to go all

the way to Pietermaritzburg to find an old old pecan orchard, planted early this century. Walnuts, relatives of the pecan, were sent by sea from Mossel Bay to the Cape Town market at one time.

Mushrooms came to the market after the first good rains of winter, but Linton preferred to collect his own pine rings in the woods of Table Mountain or shaggy ink-caps in unexpected places. He was not the sort of man to make a mistake about a death cup. He knew that some people might become violently ill after eating safe varieties but he was not one of them. He had no tests, but his weak blue eyes never failed him. Linton said that mushrooms were indigestible and had little or no food value. He loved them because they gave him an appetite for other things.

Missions sent produce to the Early Morning Market, not only fruit and vegetables but articles made of *taaihos* and *matjiesgoed*. Linton showed me a typical chair from Genadendal, reminiscent of a Madeira chair but made of reeds and twigs; price only ten shillings each in those days. The *taaihos* was also used for fish baskets. An item I had never seen before was wax from the Mamre mission. Women and children collected the fruit while the men were ploughing. The berries, boiled and skinned, yielded a pure wax for candles.

I still miss the old market when I drive along Sir Lowry Road at night. Of course the enormous Epping market is more efficient in every way; it covers sixty-four acres and handles two hundred thousand tons

of produce a year. Potatoes are sold by machine. Fruit and vegetables travel from Epping to the Congo. But the old Sir Lowry Road market stood in just about the same place for a century and a half. Linton showed me a list of market prices printed early last century, when farmers came in with loads of venison, quaggas, elephants' teeth and leaguers of brandy. The *korhaan* had not yet been protected; it was sold with the turkeys and fowls.

A city loses something valuable when it abolishes a market near its heart and drives its great rumbling belly out into the country. A market is free entertainment. You walk past noisy embankments of cabbages or onions and carrots, and you can tell where you are with your eyes shut. This is life. The market is an ever-

changing garden, built up daily from bare cement, transformed by the seasons but always a paradise for those who use their noses to revive the past. The market is the belly and also the beating heart of a city. You hear the shouts of the barrow boys, the voices of the farmers, the calling of the auctioneers; all this becomes a chapter of experience, and the aromas are like heady wines. Then the day comes when you must attend a requiem.

However, the market people of Cape Town do not lack a sense of tradition. The bell that rang the first train out of Cape Town station on a March day in 1859 was rung every day in the Sir Lowry Road market for the opening of sales. It is a ship's bell, mounted in an old-fashioned steering wheel. A bell with a story. Hansie

Waal, a bygone market master always rang the bell. He died suddenly. Next day the new man tried to ring the bell and the metal split. They gave up using the bell but when the market moved out to Epping the old, cracked bell went too.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

SMITH OF THE FISH MARKET

DOWN in the old Rogge Bay fish market of redolent memory I had a friend who was as well informed in his own field as Linton among the vegetables. He was Mr E. H. Smith, Member of the Royal Sanitary Institute, Member of the Institute of Industrial Hygiene. As a health official, first in Simonstown and then in Cape Town, my friend Smith ranked as an authority on fish and meat. I never heard him cry "stinking fish" but he could spot it unfailingly.

My fish inspector Smith may not have been in the same category as the Smith of coelacanth fame but he satisfied my curiosity in certain branches of fish lore that might have baffled the professor. When I talked

to my Smith the whole past of the Cape fishing industry rose before me. I saw the Strandlopers trapping fish and drying them in sun and wind, with the smoke from their fires keeping the flies away. They had bone hooks and harpoons. Salt as a preservative was unknown to them; but perhaps the wood ash served the purpose. They made a prehistoric fish paste by pounding sun-dried fish and adding boiling water and grains of wild cereals.

Hottentots were poor fishermen. They caught the broad, silvery fish now known as Hottentot close inshore; and it gained the name (according to Smith) because this was their main catch. Dutch visitors noted that the timid Hottentots seldom went above their knees in the sea. However, they attacked seals on

the beaches, used the skins as clothing and the bladders as water bottles. Dampier the buccaneer was one of those who was surprised to find that the Hottentots never made boats, canoes or even rafts. Later observers noted that the Hottentots had no special fish names in their language; only generic words such fish, seal and whale. They often camped for months near a dead whale, oblivious to the smell, eating the meat and storing the oil in hollow strands of kelp. Some of the Bantu races were even less enthusiastic about fish than the Hottentots. Lady Anne Barnard wrote: "Fish they seemed to have no taste for - indeed, till they reached the Cape they had never seen a fish, hooks and lines being unknown to them." Then came the Portuguese explorers, fish-lovers

to a man. Dutch sailors were just as ready to drop hand lines over the side and bring up *kabeljou* from deep water. Joris van Spilbergen caught "carpers of excellent flavour" at a river mouth in Table Bay early in the seventeenth century; a river he called Rio de Jacquelina, our less romantic Salt River. Stories of excellent fishing encouraged the Dutch East India authorities to start the Cape settlement. Once the Dutch had landed, fishing became an important industry and Cape fish were caught such as the Hottentots had never set eyes upon. Robben Island waters were explored for fish. Hendrik Claudius, the artist under the patronage of Simon van der Stel, painted a number of fish; the roman, frans-madam, electric ray, yellowtail and others. Renowned naturalists such as

Nieuhof, Tachard and Kolbe visited the Cape and described the fish. Peter Kolbe, the German, a most revealing traveller, described an early eighteenth century storm that swept the sea from False Bay deep into the Cape Flats. Thousands of wagon-loads of fish were stranded. Sea fish reached Zeekoe Vlei, still inhabited by hippo. Kolbe placed the white steenbras first among the table fish. (Hastings Beck says the red steenbras is the aristocrat, a fish with a lemon flavour, a fish that does not become coarse in old age.) Dr Andrew Smith published his treatise on fish in the eighteen-thirties. Fishermen collected specimens for him and he wrote some good early descriptions of the Cape sharks.

My friend Smith gathered stories and legends from aged Malays at Rogge

Bay. They recalled a Table Bay sea-quake in the eighteen-thirties when millions of fish were washed ashore. Poor coloured people feasted on snoek, mackerel and stockfish. The mad rush of terrified fish continued for days; some of the fish went bad; many people were taken ill and some died. Whales were cast up at lonely spots along the coast but by the time they were discovered the oil was valueless. These old fishermen always vowed that the Table Bay fishing was far better last century. They spoke of catching forty thousand harders in one night. A five hundred-pound turtle was landed on Blaauwberg beach. Boys on the old Central Jetty hauled in a kingklip four feet long weighing twenty pounds. From the rocks at Sea Point, opposite the residence of Mr C. A.

Fairbridge, an angler caught a ray measuring ten feet six inches from wing to wing; the weight was seven hundred pounds. Huge skates entered Table Bay and a one hundred and sixty pounder was hauled on to the South Arm at the docks. And of course there were stories of voracious armies of snoek taking any bait and fetching only a halfpenny each.

Rogge Bay, according to Smith, meant Rock Bay. The round stones like cannon-balls were still there when I first went down to the Table Bay Yacht Club; so I think Smith was right. Graham Botha, in one of his early works, said that the name came from the Dutch rog (skate); but he became dubious later. Rogge Bay was spelt Roche Bay on some charts, Roche being the French for rock. Some of the fishermen claimed

Adderley Street as their birthplace. It was true. Fishermen were allowed to build huts on the beach at Rogge Bay years ago and whole families lived there. Those old Malays had their own Rogge Bay dialect, their own names for birds and fish, weather and seamarks. They used Malay words that had been forgotten in the Malay Quarter. Snoek and sweet potatoes kept them going for part of the year. Rogge Bay knew two great seasons; the “big fish” period when the snoek and *geelbek* were running; and the “small fish time” that lasted eight months, when they could only expect to bring harders, *steentjies* and other such fish back to the beach.

Rogge Bay was for many years the liveliest and most interesting part of Table Bay. The fishermen were

sailors in those days and they looked the part as they slung oilskins, kerries, tackle boxes and stone anchors into the open boats and hoist their jibs and spritsails. They named the boats after their womenfolk, Fatima, Rachma and so on. It was a great spectacle, boat after boat departing or coming in laden with fish. Often the whole Malay Quarter seemed to be waiting on the beach; priests in bright robes, women in flowing Victorian skirts, redfezzed old men who had retired from the hard life afloat: Always the fish-carts were there, the horns sounding their weird unmusical notes. They washed the blood from the boats and left them far up the beach, clean and empty at last, in crescent formation. The tired fishermen drifted away from Rogge Bay and the gulls came

down for the scraps. Dr I. D. du Plessis captured the scene and lamented the passing of Rogge Bay in one of his beautiful Afrikaans poems. He saw the old Rogge Bay become dust and ashes, bricks and building plots, where the sturdy fishermen Farook, Suleiman and Abubakar once brought in their silver cargoes.

It was in the old Rogge Bay fish market that Smith showed me his favourite fish, a comparative rarity known as the butterfish. "There are other names, just to make things more difficult," Smith explained. "Some call it a *pampelmoesie* because it is shaped and coloured something like a gooseberry, with orange and rose-red fins. Others refer to the Cape Lady or *steenklipvis*. Anyway it is a shy customer, found among the rocks at Green Point and other parts of Table

Bay, but seldom hooked. These old Malay fishwives know I like butterfish, and their men folk keep some for me when they catch them in the nets. The flesh is rich, hence the name butterfish - very tender but you must eat it the same day. Fry it in butter or grill it like a sole and you have a really great dish. With half a bottle of dry white wine, of course."

Smith was also partial to large edible crabs. Trawler men sometimes kept them for him as these huge spider crabs were caught in deep water. The meat, said Smith, was coarse but sweet. He liked a crab mayonnaise or crab with a curry dressing served in half an avocado pear. Smith cooked his crawfish according to a recipe Dr Leipoldt had given him. He selected very young crawfish, killed them and placed them in boiling sea water with

seaweed, lemon, Pittosporum leaves, onion and mace. After ten minutes they were ready to be eaten hot with a sauce tartare. As a health inspector Smith naturally insisted on freshness. "Never buy a yawning mussel," he used to warn me. "They must be alive, alive-o! Jars of mussels in vinegar are no use to me. I like to scrape off the beards and barnacles and seaweed, wash out the sand and eat them raw, like oysters. Or you can make a good moules mariniere by cooking them in their own juice flavoured with garlic and white wine."

Smith saw too much of the sea and sea fish at times in the course of his duties. As a change he used to take his fishing rod to Princess Vlei on the Flats and catch the huge and reckless carp. From the fish farming point of

view, Smith declared, the arrival of carp in these waters was a disaster. Mr C. A. Fairbridge had imported an aquarium tank with six carp, four perch and two tench back in the eighteen-fifties. Only the tough carp survived the voyage. They bred fast in a pond in the botanical gardens in Cape Town and their progeny were freed in vleis and rivers. Before long they were dominating waters where trout and other superior table fish should have flourished. At Princess Vlei the carp found an ideal home; the warm water and sandy bottom suited them admirably. They bred three times a year, discoloured the water and made life impossible for the trout. Smith used grapes, melon and dough as bait and he was delighted when he caught a fat six pound carp. (I believe the record

now stands at twenty pounds.) Smith said that people who found carp muddy, bony and flavourless simply did not know how to prepare it. "Kill and clean your carp on a wet plank to preserve the attractive blue colour," Smith advised. "Simmer in salted water and eat your carp with boiled potatoes and parsley butter. The salt removes the muddy flavour. A large carp is easily filleted."

Smith came back from a holiday in Durban full of praise for the Natal fish he had tasted. He said there was a wide choice, from the salmon-bass (a sort of kabeljou) to the crab flavoured mussel cracker. He had enjoyed boiled dagger head, curried seventy-four, and fish with unfamiliar names such as Scotchman and soldier. The kippered shad was good and so was the smoked barracuda.

Natal crawfish were small and delicate. He had revelled in curried prawns and crab pie. Baked parrot fish was excellent. Fried smelt, grunter boiled with egg sauce, moonfish, pompano and queen fish were among other exotic treats. Smith knew a great deal about fish. I think his Durban holiday proved that we all need a change of diet now and then.

I was reading an expensive South African fish cookery book not long ago in which the author asserted that “the bounty offered by the two vast oceans abutting two thousand five hundred miles of coastline had been sadly neglected”. She hoped that her book would remedy the deficiency; but in reality there is no shortage. She ought to see my collection of Cape fish cookery books, ranging

from pamphlets given away by commercial firms to the satisfying fish recipes gathered by such culinary giants as Leipoldt and Victor Reitz. Some of Leipoldt’s most valuable work in this field is to be found in “*Polfyntjies vir die Proe*”, which a leading critic described as “uniquely South African”. But there is a long and enlightening fish section in Leipoldt’s earlier “*Kos vir die Kenner*”; while his “Diner’s Guide” deals in expert fashion with fish as a diet. Reitz, former head of railway catering, dealt with South African fish dishes in a thoroughly professional way in his excellent book “Quality and Quantity”. He gives you not only the international cuisine in simple terms but also the correct methods of serving Cape salmon, kingklip, stockfish and other

familiar species. Hastings Beck, who blends genuine humour with long experience, wrote a classic fish chapter in his slim but memorable book “Meet the Cape Food”. Beck warns you against the evil odour of a stockfish that has not been skinned properly. He is not afraid of confessing his mistakes; for example, the snoek he boiled with white wine, butter and lemon. Too rich, too rich! His pickled fish recipe is magnificent and he fills a gap with his method of grilling katonkel. If you have failed to read Beck then you have missed a Lynn Doyle of the Cape kitchen.

Let us not overlook Hilda Gerber with her authentic “Traditional Cookery of the Cape Malays”. She tells us of their beliefs; “some avoid red fish such as stompneus because

they consider all red fish poisonous”. She has fish recipes, all clearly based on years of successful cooking, ranging from *perdevoetjies* (periwinkles) to braised crawfish. Her earlier “Fish Fare for South African” was a complete guide to sea foods; how to buy and clean fish; basic recipes; sea fish, shellfish, all the freshwater fish from barbel to trout; all the salads and sauces.

Aagot Stromsoe must certainly not be forgotten. Born in fish-loving Norway, she adapted her skill to the Cape fish and revealed an artistic touch which made her a most popular food writer. I have her first little work “Do You Know How to Cook Fish” (1928) and the more ambitious “Aagot Stromsoe’s Fish Book”, published when she was nearly eighty. Her fish balls were so deli-

cious that a Cape Town firm was just about to put them on the market in tins when the war broke out and stopped the enterprise. She watched the fishermen making sun dried snoek and improved on the traditional process so that her version tasted like smoked salmon. The index to Mrs Stromsoe's second book proves that she knew the whole range of dishes from plain fish cakes to Sole Veronique.

No, the vast oceans that wash our shores have not been neglected. At the end of my list of fish writers I return gladly to my old friend E. J. Smith. You will be lucky to find his little pamphlet on the Parade or anywhere else, nowadays, but I have a copy beside me. He called it "Edible South African Fishes" and it came out in 1927 after he had

addressed the South African Health Officials' Association. Smith described the curing of fish and the common fish diseases. He could diagnose such conditions as milky stockfish, black stockfish, parasites of snoek. He set down the points to be observed when buying fish in masterly fashion and then described the various species from red gurnet to skate. When I park my car over the rocks and sands of Rogge Bay I remember many old friends, Smith of the fish market among them.

CHAPTER TWENTY

UNLUCKY AMBROSE

MR AMBROSE CARROLL sat at his desk in an office that seemed to have been hauled up from the bed of the ocean. It was a sort of dungeon in the basement of Cape Town's first theatre, the place that became St. Stephen's Church in Riebeek Square. The church authorities rented these solid stone cellars to all sorts of tenants: weird religions, a man who could mend anything and Ambrose Carroll. Probably few other landlords would have allowed an office to be littered with anchors and heavy marine relics; but here there was no risk of the floor giving way.

Indeed it was a most unusual office. A dangerous-looking diving outfit hung on one wall, copper helmet,

twill, rubber and all and leaden-soled boots. An air pump with rubber pipe and coiled lifeline suggested that Carroll was ready for business. Framed charts had been arranged between photographs of wrecks, wire lifting strops, blocks and tackle and all the impedimenta of a salvage enterprise. Several decaying iron cannon, still encrusted with barnacles, were propped against the walls. From the romantic point of view it was a rich collection. A brass ship's clock had, perhaps, the highest cash value; but the room was alive with possibilities. One felt the atmosphere of adventure. Ghosts of drowned seamen guarding chests of gold might have been present in that dungeon.

I was also very much aware of the presence of Ambrose Carroll. He parted his curly hair in the middle.

Now and again he smoothed his moustache. His handsome face was confident. A chart lay before him and he played with parallel rulers and dividers like an experienced navigator. I looked at the chart to see whether there was a cross marking the spot where thousands in gold awaited recovery. Carroll followed my glance and smiled. "I've got scores of wrecks pin-pointed but those charts are locked away in the safe over there," Carroll assured me. "You see, I've been in the game for over thirty years. Yes, I started in 1903 on the coast of German South West Africa, prospecting for diamonds and searching for treasure. It is an incurable disease once the germ has worked its way into your system. This is the spirit that moved Vasco da Gama, Walter Raleigh, Cook and

the rest. I read stories of treasure hunts when I was a schoolboy and now I am searching the sea-floor myself."

I did not care to remind Carroll that this incurable disease had been responsible for the loss of the coasting steamer Nautilus on Possession Island soon after World War I. They were dredging for diamonds. Carroll and all on board the Nautilus escaped when the coaster struck a rock and foundered. The shareholders were unlucky. Similar ventures in the same waters after World War II (with better machinery) have brought up diamonds worth millions. Like many pioneers, Carroll was unlucky. Yet his optimistic eyes sparkled as he described his plans for the recovery of untold wealth. He had floated a

company. The shares were not listed, so that investors never received unpleasant shocks on opening a newspaper. They had bought an old suction dredger and fitted it with a "seascope", a submarine eye. Their motorboats were dragging the bottom of Table Bay and when the wire encountered an obstruction the divers went down. Carroll indicated the worthless and rusty junk in the room as evidence of these promising activities. Various wrecks had been registered at the Customs in the name of the company and the government would receive fifteen per cent of everything salvaged and sold. "To undertake a hazard like this you must have faith in your divers," went on Carroll solemnly. "They are the men who do the work. Soon I

shall have success to report - I am convinced of that."

Carroll explained that it was just a matter of searching in the right place. Coins had been washed up on islands and parts of the Cape coast after gales; he had seen them and these coins provided valuable clues. Cannon also pointed the way to old wrecks. He had gone through the records and compiled a list of treasure ships. Round about the year 1700 a ship had disappeared mysteriously in Saldanha Bay. According to the research he had carried out in the archives this was a pirate ship with treasure worth many thousands. His divers had located a sunken vessel and this might be the pirate. They had brought up copper sheathing from the wooden hull. "I expect sensational discoveries," remarked

Carroll in tones of deep faith. Now I began to see where the money was coming from. Some people love a gamble, whether it is a Grosvenor syndicate or a treasure hunt in Cape waters. Ambrose Carroll was their man.

Carroll was not always vague. He had his eye on the *Maori*, the Shaw Savill freighter lost in a gale among the Duiker Point boulders near Hout Bay in 1909 with heavy loss of life. I pointed out that the *Maori* was carrying a cargo of dynamite and other goods that would not be worth salvaging. Carroll smiled patiently. "I am after the captain's safe," he replied. "They used golden sovereigns as money at that time. I happen to know what is in that safe."

What else? Well, there was the wreck of *Het Huis te Cruyenstein*, a

1698 wreck in the calm waters of Oudekraal not far from the scene of the *Maori* disaster. He showed me a yellow cutting from the "Cape Argus" dated March 17, 1908, with a list of relics brought up from *Het Huis te Cruyenstein*. This was authentic. The antique glassware covered with sea growths was still lovely. "The hulk remains, with its imperishable contents," ran the report. Here I must leap ahead to inform you that Oudekraal is now regarded as a kindergarten by modern skin divers. Many adventurous young men and girls have set eyes on the bones of *Het Huis te Cruyenstein* in recent years. Wine bottles, timber, metal, lead ballast and a firebrick have come to the surface. The keel timbers have been photographed, draped with seaweed. Other more

valuable objects were recovered earlier. Mystery surrounds two bronze cannon. One was found in a loft at the Oranjezicht homestead, ancestral seat of the Van Breda family, owners of Oudekraal. It came almost certainly from *Het Huis te Cruyenstein* but a member of the Van Breda family informed me that it could not be identified as embossed arms on the cannon had been deliberately obliterated. A similar cannon is to be seen in the Koopman de Wet House in Strand Street, also with the arms hammered out. Old bronze guns are now worth almost as much as gold coins when antique collectors gather in the auction rooms. Sleek and graceful, with artistic decorations, some of them have “lifting eyes” formed by gambolling dolphins. I imagine that

Carroll knew the value of bronze cannon.

Carroll also had designs on the Dutch East India ship *Standvastigheid* that went down off the Salt River mouth long ago. There was the two-century-old wreck of the French slaver *Cybelle* off Blaauwberg beach. According to Carroll, slavers always carried a lot of money either to buy slaves or as proceeds from the sale. As a contrast, there was the Portuguese liner *Lusitania* lying alongside the Bellows Rock in False Bay. When she struck at midnight in April 1911 they abandoned ship in a hurry, leaving all the ship’s money and other valuables. “Golden coins!” declared Carroll firmly. “No one has ever been near her since she went down.” Then there were three large sunken ships between Muizenberg

and the Strand; the fishermen all knew them well. Off the beach at Simonstown lay the Dutch man-o'-war *Bata*. She was on fire when she sank and divers had seen the blackened timbers and copper that had taken strange shapes when molten. Close to her was another old wreck, thought to be the Dutch frigate Holland that ran on a reef in 1786 and sank. Before steering reluctantly away from the riches of False Bay the meticulous Carroll mentioned Roman Rock as a spot worth investigating.

We then turned to a chart of the Danger Point area, scene of many disasters, and Carroll remarked with an unfeeling smile: "What is so satisfying as a good shipwreck?" He had in mind the R.M.S. Teuton that struck a reef and foundered about

eight miles from Danger Point towards the end of last century. She went down suddenly, and all but thirty-six of nearly three hundred people on board were drowned. Carroll did not need to emphasise the fact that in such an emergency no one thought of opening a safe and saving money. He related a *Birkenhead* legend I had never heard before. An old coloured woman living in an isolated shack near Danger Point often spoke of the wreck of the famous troopship. She was a child at the time but she and her mother tried to help survivors. It was said that coloured people in the district looted the bodies that washed ashore and cut off fingers to secure gold signet rings. The old woman denied these stories. She said survivors had told her mother that some people had lost

their fingers when men with knives prevented them from climbing into overloaded boats. Sharks had mutilated a number of bodies. Carroll declared, however, that he was not interested in the *Birkenhead* as a treasure ship. She had been picked clean by divers in the past.

Carroll made light of currents and tide-rips when he spoke of the enthralling ventures his divers were embarking on. Whale Rock now, there was a graveyard of the sea littered with copper ingots. The Houston steamer *Hypatia* had gone down there close to Robben Island in 1929 and many tons of valuable “blister” copper remained on the bottom. (He was right, of course, but much of it was still there after World War II; then other divers waited for calm spells between the north-

westers of winter and the summer south-easters. They were brave men. They encountered sharks and a large octopus. And they made only a very small fortune.) I think Carroll was most captivating when he discussed chinaware. It was his hobby and he spoke with authority on Delft and Chinese porcelain. Moreover he had samples from the floor of Table Bay to show me. I gathered that the Dutch at the Cape in Van Riebeeck’s day used wooden platters or pewter; but soon afterwards the Dutch started exporting Delft pottery vases and tiles, white earthenware with painted designs, glazed with enamel. Of course the Chinese had been making superb porcelain long before the Dutch invented their own process. Millions of pieces of Chinese porcelain reached Europe in the first half

of the seventeenth century; and as the ships called at the Cape there came a time when the upper classes at the Cape settlement began importing the beautiful plates, cups and bowls. In spite of all precautions the china packed in baskets and straw, cases and barrels was often broken. Carroll said the cargoes shifted in the holds of little sailing ships and fifty per cent of the china might arrive damaged.

“Table Bay is littered with fragments of china,” declared Carroll. “It is so plentiful that the British Museum experts describe this china from wrecks as ‘Table Bay china’. This must not be confused with ‘Table Bay plate’, the plates, cups . and saucers decorated with Table Bay scenes, ships and Table Mountain.” Carroll related the story of china for

my benefit. He said it started with the Ming dynasty china (1368-1644) that first reached Europe by overland routes and then rounded the Cape in Portuguese ships. This was remarkable for the painting beneath the coloured glaze. It is a very old art, based on the discovery of pure clay that burnt white. Those oriental potters made lovely ceramic ware but only the wealthy in Europe could afford to use it. Alchemists tried to work out the secret and the German apothecary Boettger discovered a glazed porcelain process. Nevertheless the Chinese continued to dominate the field. Kang Hsi porcelain (1662-1722) was landed at the Cape in large quantities and this reached new heights in colour and design. Some of it was blue on white; there were pure white cups

with decorative borders composed of gilded flowers or fish; and white bowls covered with black enamel and designs in gold. Nankin china came to the Cape in many ships during the eighteenth century, blue and white tea and dinner services that are now to be seen in museums. Then there is the eighteenth-century Imari ware, the process followed by the Japanese long after the Chinese had discovered the art of porcelain. Imari porcelain includes blue and white platters decorated with Japanese designs. Gold, red and green appear in later Imari ware and the VOC mark was often embodied at the request of the Dutch East India Company.

Carroll opened a drawer and held up a piece of Nankin willow pattern, the world famous pagodas and bridges,

and held it up to the light. "You see it is translucent," he pointed out. "That is the test of porcelain. Pottery is opaque." He showed me a fragment of Delft as a contrast, soft and yellowish. "It is beautiful, but I dislike Delft because the Dutch were inclined to imitate the Chinese," remarked Carroll. "I prefer the real thing. Delft ware is seen at its best when the makers used scenes in Holland, shepherds and milkmaids. However, I must admit that the time came when the Chinese and Japanese copied Dutch designs, landscapes, ships and so on."

I asked Carroll whether he had any unbroken porcelain and he shook his head sadly. "Our dredger got its suction pipe into the hold of a wreck and delivered a lot of china at the exhaust end - all in fragments," he

mourned. "Of course the men on board were not watching the operation properly. A diver should have gone down as soon as the first china arrived on board. He might have brought up something valuable. But we live in hopes." Carroll produced lists and photographs of porcelain and other historic treasures snatched from the sea by previous divers. His old newspaper cuttings described these as "relics of the *Haarlem* wreck"; but Carroll explained that there were a manner of wrecks off the Salt River mouth and the relics might have come from any of them. There was an ancient pistol corroded with shells; blue vases covered with barnacles; blue and white ginger jars, dishes and tureens; oriental melon bowls and rice bowls. The head of a Chinese god had been packed for

safety in a box of peppercorns and when a diver recovered it in Table Bay in the middle of last century the contents of the box had solidified. The *Middelburg* wreck in shallow water at Saldanha Bay had yielded a large number of cups, saucers and decorated tea jars in perfect condition. "Rather surprising in view of the fact that the Dutch captain blew his ship up rather than allow her to be captured by the English fleet," Carroll remarked. "They got a lot out of the *Middelburg* and there may be something left." Carroll had details of brown Martaban jars brought up from the Salt River wreck; earthenware jars made by Chinese potters, used in the Dutch ships for carrying oil and wine.

Carroll said he always hoped to find a wreck with the sort of china

described by Mentzel in the middle of the eighteenth century: "Dishes at banquets at the Cape include enormous porcelain salad dishes a yard in diameter, the like of which is a rare sight in Europe." He also wanted to recover some famille rose porcelain with the rose-pink pigment, the eighteenth-century porcelain that the Dutch loved. So the treasure dredger chartered by Carroll and his shareholders cruised along the shores of Table Bay, dropping her suction pipe in likely and unlikely places and bringing up such fascinating articles as bed-pans from the Tantallon Castle, broken cups and glasses bearing the proud emblems of various shipping lines, port-holes and a few battered spoons. She cruised past Graaff's Pool at Sea Point, watched curiously by the sun-

bathers. On this particular voyage she was close to a sunken treasure of considerable value. Unlucky Ambrose! The dredger went on and the shareholders were disappointed.

Three decades later two perlemoen divers, George Bell and his brother James, were on the bottom sixty feet down wearing skin diving outfits. They were peering among the sea anemones and kelp for the huge shells when they encountered a metal keel, a ship's bell and copper nails. The brothers were not only fishermen; they were experienced marine salvage hands holding licences from the Customs for the recovery of treasure. Very soon they were finding treasure, small, round heavy objects encrusted with marine growths. Even before they brought

these objects to the surface the Bells suspected that they had found gold.

What ship? This was a riddle until one of the brothers came upon a brass plate bearing the name B. A. Hamilton. The coins when cleaned suggested that the ship had been wrecked early last century. In the Cape archives there was a passenger list from a British ship named *Fame*, lost on the Sea Point coast on March 5, 1822. Among the passengers was Dr B. A. Hamilton. The brothers then approached me, in great secrecy, for details of the wreck. I found the whole story in various issues of the "Cape Town Gazette". She was bound from Madras to London with a mixed cargo and with a number of invalids among the passengers. They beat out of Table Bay against a northerly wind, went about off Sea

Point, missed stays and was then driven on to the rocks. Boats from Table Bay saved all but four of the ship's company. After pounding in the surf for a week the *Fame* broke up. Survivors had reason to believe that the *Fame* had been plundered before she went down. A small sandalwood box was mentioned in one advertisement; it contained diamond, emerald and ruby rings, a diamond brooch, pearls and other jewellery. It is doubtful whether any of these items were recovered. A public sale was held and timber, masts, yards and other wreckage from the *Fame* were put up to auction on the beach. The list of articles included "silk handkerchiefs and a few gold and silver coins".

So the Bell brothers searched the sunken wreckage of the *Fame* after

one hundred and forty-four years. They used pumps, airlifts and water jets to clear away the mud and granite boulders. For weeks the bathers at Graaff's Pool watched the fishing cutter riding at anchor just beyond the fringe of rocks. The Bells kept their secret. While everyone thought they were fishing they brought to the surface gold mohurs of the English East India Company, star pagodas, George III guineas and sovereigns, Spanish silver pieces of eight, silver spoons, handles of silver dishes, fragments of gold chains, one ring with a diamond and topaz. My old friend Commander W. J. Copenhagen, O.B.E., a resourceful chemist and expert on marine corrosion, took charge of the gold coins and put them in an electro-chemical cell. He switched on the

current and coins came out as though they had just been minted. According to one report, the total value was about twenty thousand Rands.

I thought of poor old Ambrose Carroll with his rusty anchors and bits of porcelain. Unlucky Ambrose searched the sands and the waters of the Cape for more than thirty years but never was he rewarded by a wreck like the Fame.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE
THE VINEYARD'S TREASURE

*Wines that, heaven knows when,
Had sucked the fire of some
forgotten sun,
And kept it thro' a hundred years of
gloom.*

TENNYSON

NEVER do I pass the wine cellars of Somerset Road without thinking of my friend Nigel Sutherland, research chemist, radio personality and wine expert. We called him Scotty because of his accent; but he was fluent in French and Afrikaans and his army language would have astounded a modern sergeant-major. Scotty was one of those who taught me to know and love wine.

Scotty's firm had a vat of twenty-year-old brandy reserved for the staff. Those were the days when a brandy drinker was looked upon with suspicion in South Africa; the correct spirit was whisky. Scotty taught me that mature Cape brandy was magnificent, the right drink before wine at dinner. I set out on many expeditions with Scotty, some as far as South West Africa; and always a litre bottle of twenty-year-old brandy went along with us. The bouquet rises in the nostrils of memory, the taste returns in all its richness, the brandy slides down in a few moments of deep pleasure, strength without fire. And there stands the tall, powerful, benevolent Scotty Sutherland, hair blond round the edges, bald as a monk, blue eyes beaming on his friends. How the

survivors miss him after all these years!

Scotty started my education by taking me to watch the coopers at work. "Good coopers are as rare as sovereigns in butter," Scotty remarked. "Most of them are Malays and they have learnt the trade from their fathers and grandfathers. They use their noses as well as their hands - they can smell a bad cask. Very often the wine taster calls on a skilled cooper for an opinion."

Steel containers and glass-lined tanks were almost unknown in the wine cellars of Cape Town between the wars. Wine firms imported oak staves from America and the Baltic, chestnut from Italy, the Brazilian timber called *macocaua*. South African timbers were too soft and were seldom used though coopers at

one firm near the Castle made a brandy vat twelve feet deep and twenty feet in diameter from local wood. This was the largest vat in South Africa at that time, with a capacity of twenty thousand gallons. The firm gave a lunch to sixteen people inside the vat; some of them could hardly climb the ladder afterwards.

So I saw the coopers bending the staves, using their eyes and the rule-of-thumb methods these craftsmen have followed for centuries. "They'll make a cask to hold fifty gallons and when it is filled they will not be more than two pints out either way," Scotty declared. "They have no instruments but they take a pride in their work. A tight cask demands great skill. It is under pressure from within, it is jolted on the road and

there must be no leaks. Look up Mendelssohn's 'Vintage Song' and you get the spirit of the trade." I did so and found this verse:

*On stave and hoop the long years
through
We work'd with will and pleasure
And when the cask was firm and
true
We press'd the vineyard's
treasure.*

Long ago there were coopers who carved designs covering the ends of vats and barrels. Their art survives in many old cellars. Nowadays master sculptors are employed to decorate vats with armorial and other designs; there is a wine cavern in the Stellenbosch district with ships and grapes and other themes on the faces of the vats. Somerset Road cellars had in their dim aisles every sort of

timber in every size from the enormous blending vats to little French feuilletes holding thirty gallons. In the fragrant darkness Scotty flashed his torch on mahogany vats bound with brass hoops; row upon row of Portuguese oak pipes that had come down the Douro in barges to find a last resting place at the Cape; French oak maturing casks in which the living wine could breathe, the mysterious Limosin oak holding elements that impart not only colour but aroma and quality to young brandy. Here were German aums containing thirty gallons of wine; French barriques and English hogsheads; cherry-wood butts from Spanish bodegas; old leaguer vats from Holland; oak casks from Madeira, casks that had reached Cape Town during the South African

War so that army officers could drink the Queen's health in their messes. Scotty said that some of the oldest casks in Cape cellars had served as water casks in Dutch East India ships.

"Rest improves wine as it revives a tired woman," Scotty informed me. "Oak is our greatest friend. Cape red wines must spend two or three years in oak casks; then they will go on improving in bottle. Sherry casks from Spain are in great demand for they give the wine a rich amber colour. Oak is responsible for half its final quality and the golden hue of a good brandy. These old oak casks were darkened by time before we were born." Scotty introduced me to a cellarer who seemed to be almost as old as the casks. He was a Roux, brought up on a Paarl wine farm; not

a scientist like Scotty but a man who had taken part in practical wine-making all his life. Roux told me that he could remember the phylloxera, the insect pest that swept through the Cape vineyards in the eighties of last century. Vines wilted and died and many farmers were ruined. If the governments of all the wine-producing countries had not acted promptly, wine might have become a rare luxury. At the Cape the quarantine regulations and the replanting of the vineyards with phylloxera-immune stocks proved effective. I asked Roux whether the Cape wines made before the phylloxera were finer than any of the twentieth century vintages. He shook his head. "Wine is far better today – but there

were some splendid wines in my youth,” he replied.*¹⁰

According to Roux nearly all the Cape wine made early last century was called “Cape Madeira”. It was

¹⁰ Among the distinguished visitors to these cellars who discussed wine with Scotty was the great M. André L. Simon, the leading connoisseur and epicure of his day. M. Simon died in 1970 at the age of ninety-four. Writing on the phylloxera a few years before his death, M. Simon declared: “Quality in wine is not a matter of fact but a matter of sensual impact: the brain gives the verdict after hearing from the three senses of sight, smell and taste, which is why difference in the quality of pre- and post-phylloxera wines must remain a matter of personal opinion. The pre-phylloxera wines had a much longer lease of life, which is not surprising since they were made from the grapes of very old vines ... whereas since the phylloxera the grafted vines have to be replanted every twenty or twenty-five years.”

white, pressed from green grapes. Some went to Brazil as a ration for slaves. Mauritius imported it. In Europe it had a bad name and one epicure declared: “Cape wine is earthy in taste and should be avoided by sophisticated palates.” However, the governor of St. Helena drank Cape wine and the garrison paid sixpence a pint and consumed eighty gallons a day. Napoleon preferred claret but he drank the Cape wines during his captivity. A sweet white muscadell, superior to the “Cape Madeira”, was sent to St. Helena for the officers.

Roux declared that the greatest Cape wine he had ever tasted was the sweet wine with a muscat flavour made from Steen grapes in the Worcester district. This was known as Oom Koos Mosterdpotjiewyn and

it was even better than the sweet Constantia that once gained world fame. Mosterdpotjie was the nickname of a farmer, Jacobus Francois Hugo, who was extremely fond of mustard. Oom Koos started making this wine early last century but only in small quantities. Apparently the vineyard was so favoured that the vines flourished without water and produced the amber wine that gained a first prize at the Paris World Exhibition in the eighteen-seventies. Dr Louis Esselen, son of the Worcester minister, took some of this wine to Europe and gave it to the wounded during the Franco-Prussian War when he was serving with the German field ambulance. Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm tasted it and asked for more. In this way a few cases reached Potsdam after

Esselen's return to the Cape. Bismarck heard of the wine and ordered some but even this distinguished customer had to wait for supplies.

Dr C. Louis Leipoldt knew this wine and investigated the story. It was perfectly true. When the Crown Prince became Emperor he called for Oom Koos Mosterdpotjiewyn during his last illness; and Sir Morrell Mackenzie, the royal physician, confirmed the fact the patient was given "a fragrant Cape wine that had been difficult to procure". Mackenzie told Leipoldt some years afterwards that the dying Emperor preferred the Cape wine to much finer European wines. Leipoldt said the Worcester wine had no close affinity to the famous sweet Constantia. The Worcester wine was "clean, spark-

ling, delicious, magnificently harmonious, not too sweet, grandly individual". Some of this unique wine is still in the possession of the Hugo family but I imagine the surviving bottles are seldom opened. All wine farmers pressed their grapes on the farms during Roux's youth and for many years afterwards. Compare this with the modern procedure; only one Cape farmer in five now makes his own wine. Roux deplored the change. The old *parstyd*, the time of the vintage, was a joyous festival in the wine districts. Machinery crushed not only the grapes but the pips and stalks, and this sometimes resulted in a harsh flavour that was absent when human feet brought out the juice. (Scotty the chemist was inclined to disagree with this verdict but Roux went on.) Old-fashioned

farmers would examine their vineyards in February and decide without instruments or outside advice when to start pressing the grapes. They looked at the colour of the grapes, crushed a few between their fingers and estimated the sugar content. Then the *trapbalies* were cleaned and the wagons came up to the cellar door loaded with baskets of grapes. Youths and girls, bare-legged and eager, leapt into the vats and marched round to the tune of a fiddle, singing as the juice began to flow. Batch after batch of pressed grapes were poured into the fermenting tub and the bare-footed young people started dancing again as more baskets of grapes arrived. The fermentation was violent. Roux said it was like a slow stew with the temperature rising and the purple

juice giving off a strong and fruity aroma. Only a very new arrival in the country would dare to drink this *soet mos*; alone or mixed with other wine or brandy, it was a knock-out. For many years, even during the first decade of this century, farmers employed hard labour convicts at the *parstyd* and paid the government one shilling a day for each man. Convicts picked and pressed the grapes, the warder standing by with a Schneider carbine. Farmers knew when the time had come to draw off the juice and pour it into hogsheads. They left enough juice in the fermenting vat to cover the husks and then transferred this residue to the iron pot below the copper dome of the brandy still. The wood fire burned steadily under the pot. A trickle of liquid passed through the coil of brass tubing,

cooled by water, and emerged from the spout. Some farmers made *wit-blits*, others matured the sort of brandy that became liquid sunshine.

Roux admitted candidly that a lot of brandy was made that did not approach the quality of his firm's twenty-year-old staff vat. Congo brandy from the Oudtshoorn district was once a first-class grape spirit; then it deteriorated. "Cape smoke" was the roughest brandy of all and only those who acquired the taste could stomach the stuff. Roux remembered a Paarl wine show in 1905 at which the judges found the dop brandy so revolting that they refused to award any prizes. Table wines at that period were dry white wine called hock; the heavy sherries; a so-called sauterne described as "between hock and sherry"; a light

claret and full-bodied Burgundy type.

Groot Constantia was the wine farm Roux most admired and I think he was right. Many of the old literary travellers made the pilgrimage to the Constantia farms. Bernadin St. Pierre, I think, was the first; and he picked muscadel grapes in the vineyard and declared that they were exactly like the wine he had just drunk in the cellar. Jane Austin had a character in "Sense and Sensibility" who treated her ailing husband with fine old Constantia. Captain Robert Percival praised the Constantia wine vaults for they were kept in better order than any others he had seen. Hildagonda Duckitt enjoyed staying at Groot Constantia with her grand-uncle. From the cellar in those days a door opened into a room filled with

maps and old weapons, Mr Cloete's own sanctuary. Mr Cloete imported choice varieties of grapes, the Saschelas for eating and the bluish-red Hermitage for claret. I still go there for wine; the government experts are in charge again after decades of private enterprise that was not, perhaps, so successful as the Cloetes were. I bring away cases of Pinotage, Shiraz and Cabernet, sound wines at reasonable prices. But always I wish that I could have savoured just a glass of the Groot Constantia wine described by Percival as "sweet, luscious and excellent". I understand that a small bin of the original Constantia is still preserved in a palace in Spain; wine that has a glass seal on the shoulder bearing the crown and monogram of Louis Phillipe, King of France. A

bottle of this wine found its way to Magdalene College, Cambridge, some years ago. It was opened reverently by men who knew their wines and found it to be in good condition and very sweet. If only I could have been there!

I discussed the charm of very old wine with Scotty and Roux, for such a wine is a link with the past. Such a wine, if it still lives when the cork is drawn, brings before the appreciative drinker its whole era and ends its life in a blaze of glory. Of course it may through sheer age win higher praise than it deserves. Yet this is an experience, one that has seldom come my way. Roux had something memorable to say on this subject. He had visited Mr A. J. F. du Toit on the farm Nieuwe Plantasie at Paarl in 1928, and had been given a small

sample of wine that had become syrupy with age. It had the flavour of *moskonfyt*. Cellar records proved that it had been made in 1801 by Hermanus Lambertus Bosman; he was a member of the family that had owned this farm on the mountain slopes from 1686 until Mr du Toit bought it nearly two and a half centuries later.¹¹

Yes, those men taught me to love wine and its mysterious alchemy. I

¹¹ Major Piet van der Byl had in his cellar at Fairfield, Caledon, a bottle of wine laid down in 1777 by an ancestor. It proved to be undrinkable. A French brandy of 1811 was still in good condition in recent years and an 1863 Madeira was magnificent. Thirty-six bottles of nineteenth century Scotch whisky, hidden by the major's father during the South African War, had a wonderful flavour when opened during World War II.

learnt that the dry red wines of this world are greatly superior to the white; a fact so little known in South Africa that one great enterprise spent huge sums not long ago trying to teach people to take the good red wine with their meat. It should be taught at school. I entered a world of exquisite flavours and learnt to use my nose; for a wine lacking aroma will not please the palate. I learnt that good wines come from coarse soil on barren hillsides; sandstone and granite and shale; not the rich, flat clay that yields fifty tons of grapes to the morgen. I heard Roux speaking of old-fashioned ways; old wooden vats instead of concrete; old-fashioned human feet instead of an egg-pair that breaks the pips; and I accepted Roux's wisdom. I learnt the meaning of bouquet; the taste of

wine with finesse, a well-balanced wine, or a robust wine carrying the aroma of flowers. Strange how the grape can give you impressions of so many different plants and flavours, from honey and nuts to spice or lemon.

I learnt that the only way to know wine is to smell and taste as many wines as possible. (Only a wine waiter in a great restaurant can follow this advice fully, for he has at his disposal the dregs of a great number of bottles.) I learnt why one vintage is very much like another at the Cape or in Australia; because the weather does not vary much; because the old wine farmers chose their vineyard sites with such great skill that almost every year is a good year. Above all I learnt that wine means far more than pressing grapes and leaving the juice

to mature. Wine has to be made. The grapes will give you a charming variety of wines but loving care is needed during the years of maturation if these wines are to appeal to all the senses. The cellar master makes each wine, filling up his casks, racking and fining with egg whites and ox-blood, filling the clean bottles with the bright wine. So the aroma comes out to me in Somerset Road as I stand there remembering old friends and breathing in the inspiring aromas of old wines.

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BACK COVER



Lawrence Green continues to build up an international reputation. Many of the finest British and American magazines have published his stories, his books have appeared in London and New York, and his work has

been translated into many languages. Here are some recent overseas opinions of his books:

London "Times": "Affection for his out-of-the-way places is the secret of Mr. Green's success... To each he brings much personal knowledge and the happiest knack of gathering information."

"Illustrated London News": "Mr. Green is a good observer. He tells his readers he is lazy. He is not, but he fills them with a lovely sense of the hot, timeless laziness to be enjoyed among his islands."

"The Times Literary Supplement": "That tireless traveller of unfrequented sea-lanes has strung together a necklace of islands which will lend enchantment to many a northern escapist's winter

discontent ... And yet this is not merely a surface and sentimental portrait of the world's least trampled parts. It is rather reminiscent of those quiet provincial museums where the noise of traffic dies suddenly away, and one finds oneself face to face with the longer visits of man's development, his adaptability and, stretching farther back, with the dilemmas of evolution.